

















BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Dissertation

THE CRITICAL THEORY AND LITERARY PRACTICE OF JOSEPH CONRAD

by

Norris Whitfield Potter, Jr.

(A.B., Colby College, 1929; A.M., Boston University, 1933)

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

1942-

1943

15







Ph D  
1943  
p  
copy 1

Approved

by

First Reader.....

Professor of

English

Second Reader.....

Professor of

English







# THE CRITICAL THEORY AND LITERARY PRACTICE OF JOSEPH CONRAD

## Table of Contents

Preface

Table of Contents

Chapter I	Bibliography and Sources	1
Chapter II	Background of Conrad as a Critic	8
Chapter III	Conrad's General Critical Ideas	24
Chapter IV	Conrad's Views Concerning the Proper Function of the Novel	48
Chapter V	Conrad's Criticism of the Technique of the Novel and Its Illustration From His Own Practice	57
Chapter VI	Glimpses of Passages in Conrad Which Seem to Illustrate His Theory of Technique of the Novel	81
Chapter VII	Conrad's Theory and Practice of the Drama	96
Chapter VIII	Conrad's Style and Word-Sense	101
Chapter IX	Conrad's Criticisms of Other Writers	109
Chapter X	The Type of Critic Conrad Is	132
Chapter XI	Conclusion	163
Chapter XII	Abstract of the Dissertation	173
Chapter XIII	Classified Bibliography	176
Appendix		193
Autobiography of the Author		199

Table of Contents

Page

Table of Contents

Chapter I Introduction and Sources

Chapter II Background of Critical Theory

Chapter III Critical Theory's General Cultural Issues

Chapter IV Critical Theory's View of the Novel

Chapter V Critical Theory's Critique of the Novel

Chapter VI Critical Theory's Critique of the Novel's Form

Chapter VII Critical Theory's Critique of the Novel's Content

Chapter VIII Critical Theory's Critique of the Novel's Style

Chapter IX Critical Theory's Critique of the Novel's Language

Chapter X The Theory of the Novel

Chapter XI Conclusion

Chapter XII Appendix

Chapter XIII Bibliography

Appendix

Bibliography of the Author

Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2013



## Preface

The writer's interest in Conrad began many years ago with the reading of Lord Jim, a novel which struck him as such an original compounding of exciting action and psychological subtlety that he was led to read all of the works of this fine craftsman. Conrad wrote about individuals who, although occupying obscure stations in life, were nevertheless significant and vital. His view of life, although not a happy one, seemed integrated and courageous. He was not a facile novelist, nor an insincere one. Too sophisticated to preach, edify, or console, he yet had a warm feeling for humanity, and a pity tempered with a sufficient irony. Above all, he was a fluent and delicate artist with a carefully evolved technique and a high appreciation of form.

As the writer became better acquainted with Conrad through reading his letters and hearing reports of those who knew him personally, he came to respect him as a man. Conrad was simple, warm-hearted and generous, loyal to his friends, quick to attack injustice and sham. He rarely wasted his forces on trivial objectives; what was primary and universal interested him first, and he had no patience with narrow doctrines or sentimental crusades.

Finally, the writer became interested in Conrad's capabilities as a critic. Scattered through his works were





many critical dicta which seemed both shrewd and sensitive. It is the purpose of this study to abstract and arrange that theory. The real genesis and development of a work of art is always a matter of mystery, and when a self-conscious artist like Conrad tries to explain this strange process, he is worthy of a hearing.

There are a number of reasons for engaging in this project. First, it points out a generally unsuspected critical insight in Conrad. His novels, of course, are far more important than his critical essays, but the latter are of greater extent and acumen than is realized by the casual reader of Conrad. In studying his theory, therefore, we are not trying to make tea without water. Second, an examination of a novelist's critical theories leads to a clearer understanding of his novels. This is especially true with Conrad because much of his theory is connected with the technical problems he met in fashioning his own fiction. The discriminating reader of a novel must explore its making, follow its craft; in much of what we say about novels we are impeded by our lack of knowledge concerning what Percy Lubbock calls "their technical aspect". Third, an artist's reflections on his art are valuable in themselves. The Ars Poetica, the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads, A Defence of Poetry--and all such articles of faith--are valuable, even without reference to their authors, as correctives and stimulants. Finally, this particular approach to Conrad has not been made before.





Since nearly everything which an author writes is in a sense an index to the man himself, it was necessary, in reconstructing Conrad's critical theory, to read not only his letters and essays, but all of his fiction and also everything available and important which had been written about him. This had two useful effects: first, many angles and facets of Conrad's achievements which might have gone unobserved were illuminated and re-focussed; second, the writer's own valuation of Conrad was challenged and checked. It was also necessary to cull out all the critical theorizings from Conrad's writings and arrange them in a coherent fashion. What was hasty marginalia and impulsive outburst had to be separated from what was integrated and thoughtful. It was then necessary to observe the fundamental principles underlying the body of criticism which, year after year, Conrad added to his fiction. Then his theory had to be checked against his actual literary practice. References to his novels in this study will usually be for the purpose of showing to what extent he observed his own recommendations. The final task was to evaluate his theory and to place him among the critics of his generation.

This study incidentally contributes to a program of similar research being directed by the Department of English in the Graduate School of Boston University. I must thank the Rev. John Zelig and Mrs. Camille Ingalls, who knew Conrad





personally, for their information concerning him. Professor Herman Meissner of M. I. T. helped me to translate the German dissertations on Conrad. Professor Erich Walter of the University of Michigan supplied me with critical comments on Conrad. The officials at Widener Library, the Boston Public Library, and the library at the University of Michigan were very considerate in putting their facilities at my disposal.

Despite his importance in English letters, few critics have devoted to Conrad a detailed, full-length study. In addition to the half-dozen complete novels, however, there are many excellent short pieces. Although most deal exclusively with Conrad as a writer, many of them take incidental approaches toward his life, and it is therefore necessary to describe them.

The best biography is George John Agnew's two-volume study, valuable because it comes from personal acquaintance and because it contains many of Conrad's letters to various friends and business associates. An interesting supplement to this is F. H. Ford's more personal recollections of Conrad. Ford was an intimate friend of the novelist, as was Richard Curle, who published two important works on Conrad, one in 1914 and one in 1923. The best biographical treatment of Conrad's early years came from Walter Dill Scott, who in 1900 wrote *The Polish Heritage of Joseph Conrad*. Although one may





## Chapter I

### Bibliography and Sources

#### Bibliography

The following are the biographies, full-length critical works, dissertations and miscellaneous writings which the writer has found to be most helpful in writing about Conrad, and which require more lengthy mention than the detailed classified bibliography at the end of the book.

Despite his importance in English letters, few critics have devoted to Conrad a detailed, full-length study. In addition to the half-dozen complete surveys, however, there are many excellent short pieces. Although none deal exclusively with Conrad as a critic, many of them make incidental approaches toward this angle, and it is therefore necessary to describe them.

The best biography is George Jean Aubrey's two-volume study, valuable because it comes from personal acquaintance and because it contains many of Conrad's letters to various friends and business associates. An interesting supplement to this is F. M. Ford's more personal recollections of Conrad. Ford was an intimate friend of the novelist, as was Richard Curle, who published two important works on Conrad, one in 1914 and one in 1923. The best biographical treatment of Conrad's early years comes from Gustav Morf, who in 1930 wrote The Polish Heritage of Joseph Conrad. Although one may





not agree with Morf's ingenious interpretations of the novels, an interpretation "based on the psychology of Freud and Jung", one finds material here not available elsewhere. Mrs. Conrad's books about her husband do not greatly assist one who is searching for his literary theories, but they have a unique interest on other grounds.

A good study of Conrad's mind and method has been made by R. L. Megroz. It is marred now and then by pages of over-eloquent impressionism, a sort of soul-searching which makes the reader wonder uneasily, "On what grounds can this be said?" This sort of interpretation must be used very warily.

Ruth M. Stauffer makes an analysis of what she calls Conrad's "romantic-realism". She discusses the differences in subject matter, method, and spirit which exist between the Romantic and the Realistic writer, and then concludes that "Joseph Conrad employs Realism or Romanticism or both whenever either or both may be needed to create the impression of actuality." Her book contains a bibliography which is excellent for the years up to 1922.

Frank Cushwa ingeniously pieces together scraps of Conrad's own autobiographical writings and literary essays and makes a connected story such as Conrad never told. This work contains much of the literary gossip which is scattered through the novelist's writings.





The best of the recent treatments of Conrad is Edward Crankshaw's Joseph Conrad: Some Aspects of the Art of the Novel, published in 1936. It is written with much spirit and indicates a good understanding of the complexities of novel-writing. It is somewhat overladen with literary comparisons and discussions of general aesthetic problems which detour the reader from Conrad himself, but these asides are worth reading for their own sake.

Under a criticism of art must lie a criticism of life, and William W. Bancroft devotes his dissertation to Conrad's philosophy of life--the relation of the Individual to the Moral Law in the midst of an indifferent Cosmos. Mr. Bancroft finds that Conrad believed Self-Realization to be the only form of triumph, especially the realization of the social self, "for the unity of life is described in a context of which each individual is part". Mr. Bancroft's paper is thought-provoking, but may mislead the reader into believing that Conrad was a systematic philosopher, rather than merely a discerning man who sometimes made philosophic remarks.

Conrad's characters are analyzed by Hildegard Ben-nivitz and E. V. Mandl in two dissertations: the former wrote "Die Charaktere in den Romanen Joseph Conrad"; the latter wrote "Die Frau bei Joseph Conrad". Johanna Burkhardt stresses the biographical aspect in a dissertation entitled "Das Erlebnis der Wirklichkeit unde seine kunstlerische Gestaltung in Joseph Conrad's Werk". These works, printed abroad, are





available in Widener Library at Harvard. J. D. Gordan devotes a dissertation to "Joseph Conrad, his development as a novelist from amateur to professional". The work appeared in book form in 1940 and was published by the Harvard University Press. Mr. Gordan places his emphasis on the first ten years of Conrad's writing career, and very carefully traces the transition from seaman to novelist.

Another critic of Conrad is Hugh Walpole, whose Joseph Conrad, published in 1916, is the best of the older books. H. L. Mencken has a violent but often penetrating analysis of Conrad in his A Book of Prefaces (1917), an essay which rather pleased Conrad when he read it. W. L. Cross writes clearly and soberly about Conrad in his Four Contemporary Novelists.

Liam O'Flaherty's Joseph Conrad: an appreciation will strike some readers as pretentious and incoherent. Patrick Braybrooke's essay in his Some Victorian and Georgian Catholics is special pleading which makes the unlikely contention that Conrad's genius was inspired by his Catholicism, that his philosophy was Catholic, and that he could not have found reality without the aid of the Church.

There is a wealth of good critical comment in American periodicals, and in general surveys of English literature which are mentioned in the Bibliography. The periodical material will be set down in the Bibliography in the form which





is familiar to users of the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature. It will be a pleasure to express in succeeding pages my indebtedness to these writers as I make use of them.

### Sources

Conrad's most systematic criticism appears in the prefaces to his novels. In 1937 J. M. Dent and Sons published these prefaces in a very convenient single volume with an introduction by Edward Garnett. My own footnotes, however, will refer to pages in Doubleday, Doran's Canterbury edition of Conrad's works.

The prefaces are frank, compact analyses of the literary problems which presented themselves as the various novels took shape--problems in interpretations of character, in relation of setting and atmosphere to events, in angle of narration, in verisimilitude, in emotional shadings. In these good-humored and thoughtful appraisals of his own work, one sees Conrad the critic at his best.

A somewhat different type of criticism appears in his letters. A thorough combing of the hundreds of missives which Conrad sent to his friends over a period of thirty years will uncover a mass of literary opinion, some of it devoted to his own works and some to the writings of his friends and contemporaries. Most of it is very informal, done on the spur of the occasion, and probably quite original and sincere. At times he is violent and hasty. Often he is so eulogistic that





one suspects that his warm heart and capacity for friendship led him to abandon cool critical judgment. But in these letters to Curle, Garnett, Wells, Cunninghame-Graham, Jean-Aubry, and dozens of others one observes an artist who knows much of literature, and of the painful trials of creation.

Three volumes of an autobiographical nature must be noted particularly as depositories for Conrad's theories, or as additional revelation of his character. The first, A Personal Record, was written, as he says, to present "the man behind the books....to give the record of personal memories by presenting faithfully the feelings and sensations connected with the writing of my first book and with my first contact with the sea". This is not an autobiography of the conventional sort. As Gustav Morf says, "One might be tempted to say that the work was written by fits, without the faintest hint of a directing idea, in that nonchalant, haphazard way which Poles are prone to mistake for a sign of elegance, if not of high art."

The second, Notes on Life and Letters, is a collection of essays written between 1898 and 1920 and are described by Conrad as "....a thin array (for such a stretch of time) of really innocent attitudes: Conrad literary, Conrad political, Conrad reminiscent, Conrad controversial."

The third, The Mirror of the Sea, is partly autobiographical, partly descriptive of various aspects of life





at sea. Conrad calls it "....the best tribute my piety can offer to the ultimate shapers of my character, convictions, and, in a sense, destiny--to the imperishable sea, to the ships that are no more, and to the simple men who have had their day."

In his many novels there is little that can be called literary criticism as such, but the reader becomes familiar with certain attitudes, certain approaches to life, which help to identify and to describe Conrad. The novels form a necessary background for the man. Some of the ruminations of the character Marlowe, for instance, may be taken as the real opinions of Conrad. Many of the events were taken almost bodily from Conrad's own experience. Such material, however, must be used discreetly, if at all.

There are a number of odds and ends in Conrad's productions which offer shreds of evidence--such things as an appreciation of Hugh Walpole, an introduction to Crane's The Red Badge of Courage, an essay on Proust. These items are listed in the Bibliography.





## Chapter II

## BACKGROUND OF CONRAD AS CRITIC

It would be interesting if we could point specifically to great English novelists, Victorian or contemporary, who powerfully influenced Conrad's conceptions of what a novel should be. There is, however, a baffling lack of evidence that he owed very much to the British tradition of novel-writing. But Joseph Conrad seems not to have been influenced in any important way by the English novelists prior to 1880. This does not mean that he was ignorant of them--he was fond of Dickens and Marryat, and makes brief mention of others--but there is not the slightest evidence that he studied them as models or was interested in their theory of craftsmanship. His reading in English literature as a whole was simply that of an intelligent foreigner who had little time to make more than a rapid survey of the literature of an adopted country.<sup>1</sup>

From 1880 on, however, Conrad was more sensitive to literary currents in England. In the decades from 1880 to 1900 he made the transition from seaman to novelist, won the friendship of a number of well-known English writers, and served the hardest years of his apprenticeship as a novelist.

<sup>1</sup>The scattering nature of his comments on the older English writers is reported by R. L. Megroz in A Talk With Joseph Conrad, p. 45.





We do know that Conrad became an active member of the writing community in London<sup>1</sup> and that he discussed current literature endlessly with such men as John Galsworthy, Edward Garnett, Ford Madox Ford, Jean-Aubry, Stephen Crane, and Richard Curle. He was influenced by his literary milieu after 1880 in the rather indefinable way in which any sensitive mind is shaped by the intellectual cross-currents of his day. All we can safely say here is that Conrad started from a few central art-concepts, derived largely from the romantic school of criticism<sup>2</sup>; that he proceeded with courage and originality to write novels which in the main followed those central concepts; that he was coached in the mechanics of English style by his literary friends.

Eclecticism, experimentation, wider subject matter, the absence of an authoritative literary dogma--all of these tendencies of novel-writing in the decades from 1894-1924 meant that an individualistic writer like Conrad could range widely in a comparatively untrammelled search for a technique suited to his own peculiar genius.

<sup>1</sup>For an interesting description of this community see Arnold Bennett's Journals, 1898-1910. These contain a number of gossip references to Conrad.

<sup>2</sup>The concepts are treated in detail in Section VI, and need only to be mentioned here.





To turn to any interest or knowledge Conrad may have had of the criticism of this period, we should remind the reader that Arnold, Ruskin, Pater, and Stevenson had either just died or had virtually completed their labors. Their immediate successors were not men of the same stature, although their critical writings were frequently agreeable and useful. In this period there is a curious lack of purpose and direction in English criticism, although one does meet much that demonstrates a graceful sort of scholarship. Even Pater is charged by George Saintsbury with "a certain eclectic and composite character, a want of definite four-square originality, which has been remarkably and increasingly characteristic of the century itself."<sup>1</sup> Saintsbury himself refuses to be guided by extant principles or "rules" in criticism!<sup>2</sup>

Other observers<sup>3</sup> suggest that this condition was due to a British distrust of general ideas in criticism and the arts, a reluctance to engage in close analysis and evaluation, a dislike for such battles as the humanist-naturalist or the aesthetic-sociological debates.

<sup>1</sup>A History of English Criticism, p. 498.

<sup>2</sup>For a sweeping indictment of modern English criticism see Arnold Bennett's "English Literary Criticism" in Books and Persons.

<sup>3</sup>Manly, Millett & Rickert, Contemporary British Literature, P. 100.





Whether this is quite fair to the British or not, it is difficult to find any pronounced tendency or school of criticism in the period. What Hugh Walker said of the critical prose of the Victorian period is especially true of the last decades of the century. It is an "unmanageable subject, both because of its volume and because of its variety. Classification is extremely difficult."<sup>1</sup> Orlo Williams also points out that the period reveals few dominant critical tendencies or personalities: "The vast literary market-place of English letters is not sharply divided throughout into sections over which Romanticists, Classicists, Impressionists and Moralists hang up their respective banners."<sup>2</sup> It would therefore be apparent that in this period Conrad could scarcely be affected by any very definite literary critical school. If one can speak of "the English mind", it appears that this mind did not run in this period to analysis of the principles of artistic creation anyway. Its best efforts in the field of criticism, however, have much color, form, and style. Skimming the surface of art rather than digging at its roots, it is graceful, lively, and pleasant to read.

<sup>1</sup>Cambridge History of English Literature, vol. XIV, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup>Contemporary Criticism of Literature, p. 38. This book is an excellent guide, published in the year of Conrad's death, 1924.





The tremendous increase in the number of English readers has produced a large crop of literary reviews, and the English preference for appreciation over analysis has encouraged laxity of taste and weakness of discrimination. The reviews are sane but unexciting, designed for "plain people, hostile to fads, often lacking in penetration and authority."<sup>1</sup> As far as Joseph Conrad was concerned, the minor controversies in the criticism of the period<sup>2</sup> had little bearing on his work, and in none of his letters or essays is there any significant mention of the critics. He could hardly have been unaware of them, but there is no indication that they had any appreciable influence on his own critical leanings. He followed the journalistic criticism of the day--that is, the book-reviewers--with great interest, especially when they dealt with his books; but he followed them with the simple curiosity and the natural egotism which any writer feels when his own work and that of his fellow craftsmen is under discussion. He certainly did not take part in the defense of any particular school of criticism; indeed, on several occasions he ridiculed the "fettering dogmas" of the various schools of criticism.

<sup>1</sup>Williams, op. cit., chap. 2

<sup>2</sup>For a description of the individuals and groups who take part in these controversies, see Williams, op. cit., chapters 3 and 4.





This does not mean that he did not have a fairly definite critical prepossession. The key to that prepossession is in a single sentence from a letter to George T. Keating; he is protesting against H. L. Mencken's insistence that the "Slavic influence" is strong in his work, and he says, "....if my mind took a tinge from anything it was from French romanticism perhaps."<sup>1</sup>

The most interesting part of Conrad's critical theory is that which is devoted to answering the practical question: What constitutes a good novel? And here he speculated endlessly and consulted earnestly with all of his literary friends. The theory which he finally evolved was a result of the most bitter effort and self-analysis, and had little to do with the formal criticism of those days.

It may be that the very absence of any pronounced controversy in the field of aesthetics and the higher criticism explains why Conrad, in the years after he left the merchant marine and lived in England, swung no vigorous cudgel for any British critic and acknowledged no great indebtedness to any school of British criticism.

It would appear, then, that in order to explore the background of Conrad as a critic we must look farther into the past than the period 1894-1924. We must look to his biography, to his education, to his training in Continental literature.

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, II, 288-89 (*italics mine*)





It is fairly easy to relate the outer story of Conrad's life because we have the record of what schools he attended, what ships he sailed in, what friends he made. It is more difficult, however, to trace the development of the inner man, the formative intellectual influences which finally produced a critic. This is especially true when one considers the unusual if not bizarre nature of Conrad's early life. Often without his conscious knowledge, there worked in his mind the effects of his Polish nationality, his years in Russia, his interrupted and helter-skelter education, his long years as a seaman, and his naturalization as an Englishman. Certainly there are few writers in English who have had such an unorthodox preparation for their craft, or one more difficult to assess. As he himself points out in A Personal Record:

That which in their grown-up years may appear to the world about them as the most enigmatic side of their natures, and perhaps must remain forever obscure even to themselves, will be their unconscious response to the still voice of that inexorable past from which their works of fiction and their personalities are remotely derived.<sup>1</sup>

As far as his development as a critic is concerned, it will be noted from the bare story of his life that Conrad was removed at an early age from the bookish and academic society which nurtures most professional critics. It is a

<sup>1</sup>A Personal Record, p. xxi.





fairly safe generalization, however, that any mature, intelligent, educated person who belongs to a literary family and is accustomed to reading in three languages can arrive at sensible literary judgments, even if he has not had any formal training in aesthetics or literary criticism as such. This was the case with Conrad; this was the way in which he evolved his critical theory. He had a wide, cosmopolitan acquaintance with literature, but apparently read little of the formal criticism of his day. He was sensitive to literary values, but knew no more about the "schools" of criticism than any ordinarily cultured person. He admitted that he was influenced by French romanticism,<sup>1</sup> but it was the practice of the romantic fiction-writers rather than the intricacies of their theory which interested him. He was able, out of his wide reading, to discuss some of the problems of critical theory, but the most authoritative and valuable part of Conrad's criticism is that which deals with the immediate, practical aspects of the mechanics of novel-writing.

That Conrad gravitated from the life of a mariner to that of a critic and novelist is less surprising than that he ever went to sea at all. As John Gordan points out, Conrad's impulse to write accorded with family tradition.<sup>2</sup> His grandfather, Teodor Nalecz Korzeniowski, was a literary

<sup>1</sup>cf. p. 13 of this study.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Conrad: The Making of a Novelist, p. 20.





dilettante and once wrote a verse tragedy in five acts. His uncle Thaddeus published his memoirs in two volumes in 1900.<sup>1</sup> His father, according to Conrad, was "a remarkable translator of Shakespeare, Victor Hugo and Alfred de Ligny, to whose drama Chatterton, translated by himself, he had written an eloquent preface...."<sup>2</sup>

The very nature of his reading would suggest that Conrad in the early years of his life developed a critical sensitivity rather than a definite critical theory. This reading brought him into contact with literary practices which he could admire, but it was only after he had produced creative work himself that he gave form to a theory. He says:

One does one's work first and theorizes about it afterwards. It is a very amusing and egotistical occupation....<sup>3</sup>

From the testimony of those who knew him best, it appears that Conrad, despite the sporadic and unsystematized nature of his schooling, was an omnivorous reader and seeker after knowledge. In his introduction to a collection of Conrad's French letters, Jean-Aubry says:

Il lisait avidement des livres polonais et français; poètes, livres de voyage et d'aventures, traductions de Walter Scott, de Fenimore Cooper, de Dickens. Il faut avoir vécu avec lui, comme

<sup>1</sup>For an interesting account of these, see Gustav Morf, The Polish Heritage of Joseph Conrad, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>A Personal Record, Author's Note, p. xi.

<sup>3</sup>Tales of Unrest, Author's Note, p. vii.





je l'ai fait, pour savoir quelle étonnante connaissance il avait des romans de Balzac, de Flaubert, d'Anatole France, des contes de Maupassant, d'un grand nombre de nos ouvrages historiques....mémoires, journaux, souvenirs, et, aussi bien, des oeuvres d'écrivains plus recents, Henri de Regniers, Marcel Proust, Andre Gide, Valery Larbaud, Paul Morand.<sup>1</sup>

R. L. Megroz, in reference to a paragraph by Curle, says:

Mr. Richard Curle has told us that Conrad's erudition, chiefly in the byways of European history and biography of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was immense, and that he remained to the end the omnivorous reader he had always been. Even without Mr. Curle's testimony, an attentive reader could not fail to realize the enormous intellectual range of his work, the sheer quantity and variety of the facts as to persons and places embodied in his stories.<sup>2</sup>

H. R. Lenormand adds his word as follows:

J'ai noté quelques-unes de ses préférences et de ses exclusions. Il rendait hommage à Kipling, à Hardy, à Bennett, mais il détestait Meredith, dont la réputation lui semblait sur un bluff conscient d'une partie de la critique anglaise. Les couleurs fausses, l'exotisme insipide de Hichens lui arrachaient de joyeux sarcasmes. Sévère pour Bret-Harte, O'Henry, [sic] Frank T. Bullen et même Hawthorne, il parlait des écrivains français avec une tendresse filiale. Flaubert et Gide lui étaient familiers. Il avouait mal connaître Strindberg. Nous nous taisons sur Dostoevsky, dont l'oeuvre lui semblait exhaler "une mauvaise odeur insupportable." Il aimait Tourguenieff, "qui avait mis toutes les activités humaines a l'épreuve de l'amour".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Lettres Francaises (introduction et des notes de G. Jean-Aubry.

<sup>2</sup>A Talk With Joseph Conrad, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup>"Hommage à Joseph Conrad" in La Nouvelle Revue Francaise, December, 1924.





In A Personal Record Conrad himself describes the wide extent of his reading.

Since the age of five I have been a great reader, as is not perhaps wonderful in a child who was never aware of learning to read. At ten years of age I had read much of Victor Hugo and other romantics. I had read in Polish and in French, history, voyages, novels; I knew "Gil Blas" and "Don Quixote" in abridged editions; I had read in early childhood Polish poets and some French poets, but I cannot say what I read on the evening before I began to write myself. I believe it was a novel, and it is quite possible that it was one of Anthony Trollope's novels. It is very likely. He is one of the English novelists whose works I read for the first time in English. With men of European reputation, with Dickens and Walter Scott and Thackeray, it was quite otherwise....<sup>1</sup>

What a man reads is part of his biography, and what Conrad read went into the making of his critical prepossessions. To be sure, we cannot estimate the exact influence of each of his literary heroes--but we do have, in his own words, eloquent appreciations of some of them. These essays, mostly from Notes On Life and Letters, will be treated in later sections.

Although we are interested more in Conrad's development as a critic than as a novelist, it is true that part of his critical theory was derived from his actual practice as a novelist. Therefore we are justified in referring to the biographical sketch<sup>2</sup> and pointing out that the great bulk of Conrad's fiction stems out of his adventurous life as a seaman.

<sup>1</sup>p. 71.

<sup>2</sup>Appendix A.





Conrad made the transition from mariner to author rather gradually. There is some truth in Jean-Aubry's statement: "Africa killed Conrad the sailor and strengthened Conrad the novelist."<sup>1</sup> Upon his return from the short voyage to Rouen in the Adowa in January, 1894, he had no clear-cut intention of leaving the sea, but the decision was almost insensibly made. "Circumstances and the still secret impulse of his nature were the determining factors...."<sup>2</sup> It was not exactly the allure of a literary career that held him to the land, because he had little confidence that he could make more than a bare living thus; rather it was the knowledge that his health was sapped, that he no longer had the energy for the strenuous life of a sailor. Even after he had finished Almayer's Folly he was in doubt as to the wisdom of the change until Edward Garnett encouraged him to begin another book.<sup>3</sup> Jean-Aubry's account of his gradual entry into the world of letters is borne out by Conrad himself. In the Author's note to Victory, speaking of the characters of Heyst, Jones, and Pedro, he says:

It seems to me but natural that those three buried in a corner of my memory should suddenly get out into the light of the world--so natural that I offer no excuse for their existence. They

<sup>1</sup>Joseph Conrad, I, p. 143.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>3</sup>For Conrad's expression of indebtedness to Garnett see the Author's Note to An Outcast of the Islands, p. viii.





were there, they had to come out; and this is sufficient excuse for a Writer of tales who had taken to his trade without preparation, or premeditation and without any moral intention but that which pervades the whole scheme of this world of senses.<sup>1</sup>

An examination of letters which he wrote to Marguerite Poradowska from 1890-1895 reveal that this charming lady, the widow of a somewhat distant cousin of Conrad's, may have had a considerable effect on his transition to go a new way of life and helped him in his intellectual curiosity. This, however, has no specific relationship to his writings. As the editors of these letters say,<sup>2</sup> she warmly sympathized with his loneliness in an adopted country and encouraged him in his literary endeavors.

Having made the decision to devote himself to writing, Conrad plunged strenuously into his new work. This labor, according to Jean-Aubry,<sup>3</sup> had no interruption except for a few visits to F. M. Hueffer<sup>4</sup> at Winchelsea, to Henry James at Rye, to H. G. Wells at Sandgate, and an occasional trip to London where he met friends such as Edward Garnett, W. H. Hudson, E. V. Lucas, Percival Gibbon, Hugh Clifford, and Edmund Gosse. This group of friends, among whom must be included

<sup>1</sup>p. xv (*italics mine*).

<sup>2</sup>Letters of Joseph Conrad to Marguerite Poradowska, 1890-1900, edited by John A. Gee and Paul J. Sturm, p. xiv.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Conrad, I, p. 168-69.

<sup>4</sup>For a stinging depreciation of F. M. Hueffer's character and influence on Conrad, see Mrs. Conrad's Joseph Conrad and His Circle, pp. 63-65.





R. B. Cunninghame-Graham, John Galsworthy, Gilbert Murray, and W. P. Ker, assisted Conrad in making the difficult transition from seaman to author.<sup>1</sup>

Whoever reads the books of Joseph Conrad, especially A Personal Record, The Mirror of the Sea, and Notes on Life and Letters, will see at once that he has made immediate use of his experiences. As one of his early biographers said, "....this writer deliberately evokes the power of personal reminiscence, charging it with the burden of his philosophy and the creation of his characters."<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately Conrad is quite specific about how he transformed actual incidents into fiction-elements. Although he sometimes protested against being known only as a writer of sea-stories, Conrad realized fully the tremendous influence which the sea had on his art. In the Author's Note to The Mirror of the Sea, he says:

Subjugated but never unmanned I surrendered my being to that passion which, various and great like life itself, had also its periods of wonderful serenity which even a fickle mistress can give sometimes on her soothed breast, full of wiles, full of fury, and yet capable of an enchanting sweetness.... Beyond the line of the sea-horizon the world for me did not exist as assuredly as it does not exist for the mystics who take refuge on the tops of high mountains. I am speaking now of that innermost life,

<sup>1</sup>William Rothenstein has a further account of Conrad's literary friends in an article in the Atlantic, p. 149: F '32.

<sup>2</sup>Hugh Walpole, Joseph Conrad, p. 7.





containing the best and the worst that can happen to us in the temperamental depths of our being, where a man must indeed live alone but need not give up all hope of holding converse with his kind...."<sup>1</sup>

To show the extent to which his experience as a mariner supplied Conrad with material for his plots, it is necessary only to turn to a few of the many admissions which he makes on this point.<sup>2</sup> Given such a rich background, all he needed to become a novelist was the initial impulse to write, the encouragement of friends to sustain him, and a wide reading to give him hints as to procedure.

According to those critics who use the psychological approach to literature, a man's writing is conditioned by what resides in his Unconscious, his memories, his experiences, the various impacts that life has made. In his mind are stored all sorts of latent responses which are called forth, often to his great surprise, by a certain stimulus. Mr. Gustav Morf quite frankly writes of Conrad according to Freudian methods. We could not find that Conrad "projected" himself on the character of Kurtz in The Heart of Darkness and thus gave reign to a suppressed desire to go to pieces as Kurtz did. Or perhaps the novelist felt an unsuspected tendency toward cannibalism and sublimated it by writing Falk. Perhaps his love of the wide ocean could be explained by a Freudian "displacement", a hatred of the cramping life on land resulting from the restrictions which society placed on his family in Poland and Russia....

<sup>1</sup>pp. viii-x.

<sup>2</sup>Examples are: Author's Notes to A Set of Six, p. viii, An Outpost of Progress, p. ix, Nostromo, pp. vii-viii, and Youth, p. xi. Other examples are given by Gordan, op. cit., II.





There is, however, no necessity for this sort of biographical dredging. Our purpose, in part, in this chapter has been to point to the background of Conrad's life for the explanation for his Minerva-like appearance as a novelist and critic. The most astonishing aspect of his life is the suddenness with which this gifted Pole, who could not speak the language of England until he was nearly twenty years old, became a full-fledged English man of letters. It was advisable, therefore, to speak of the exciting adventures which formed the subject matter for the novelist and the training and education which went into the making of a critic.





## Chapter III

## CONRAD'S GENERAL CRITICAL IDEAS

Very early in his writing career Conrad seemed to feel the necessity of erecting for himself a theory of art, and in the preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus we find his first important manifesto. This formulation, according to Chevalley, satisfied "the need of logic which he had acquired from his French culture, but at the same time it satisfied the Slavic instinct for imprecision."<sup>1</sup>

Whether or not French culture is distinguished by an impelling drive toward logical thinking, it is fairly certain that the imprecision which Chevalley attributes to "a Slavic instinct" is really no more than the incoherence and tentativeness from which all men and critics alike, even the most precise, must at times suffer as they try to understand and judge a work of art. It is possible that an artist, in a fine frenzy of creation, may be unconscious of any theory of art--but an artist who would be a critic has to make his philosophy conscious to himself. Conrad felt the need of finding some terms by which he could describe the purpose and function of the novels which it was his main business to write.

The theory which he finally evolved was not a particularly abstruse or esoteric one, but for him it satisfactorily bulwarked the judgments which he made in literary matters.

<sup>1</sup>The Modern English Novel, pp. 182-83.





He realized quite well the elusive nature of beauty, and as far as books are concerned he knew well the extreme difficulty of analyzing their merits. A book is by no means a constant thing, but takes on all sorts of unexpected significances according to the reader who surveys it; and even the most objective critic sometimes finds that the book he analyzed yesterday is not the same book when he re-reads it today. Conrad often spoke of the difficulty of arriving at satisfactory standards of criticism, but he was unwilling to proceed without some touchstones and some central conception of art.

Between the artist's original view of reality and his final setting forth of that view in a creative work of art, there are many disruptive, or blurring, or side-tracking influences which act upon him. The first purity of his conception is sometimes destroyed, and he is sadly aware that the final product is not as beautiful as he had planned. His defection may be a mere physical matter, a sudden laziness, a dulling of the senses because of bodily weariness. Or it may be a much more serious matter--an intellectual or spiritual lapse which may take the form of excessive sentimentality, or insincerity, or special pleading, or deliberate distortion.

Conrad is acutely aware of these fallibilities in the artist. Over and over again he insists on truth and





sincerity as prime qualities in art. For example, we find him saying, in the Author's Note to Under Western Eyes:

My greatest anxiety was in being able to strike and sustain the note of scrupulous impartiality. The obligation of absolute fairness was imposed on me historically and hereditarily, by the peculiar experience of race and family, in addition to my primary conviction that truth alone is the justification of any fiction which makes the least claim to the quality of art or may hope to take its place in the culture of men and women of its time. I had never been called before to a greater effort of detachment: detachment from all passions, prejudices and even from personal memories.<sup>1</sup>

In another essay he says:

In truth every novelist must begin by creating for himself a world, great or little, in which he can honestly believe. This world cannot be made otherwise than in his own image: it is fated to remain individual and a little mysterious, and yet it must resemble something already familiar to the experience, the thoughts and the sensations of his readers. At the heart of fiction, even the least worthy of the name, some sort of truth can be found--if only the truth of a childish theatrical ardour in the game of life, as in the novels of Dumas the father. But the fair truth of human delicacy can be found in Mr. Henry James's novels: and the comical, appalling truth of human rapacity let loose amongst the spoils of existence lives in the monstrous world created by Balzac. The pursuit of happiness by means lawful and unlawful, through resignation or revolt, by the clever manipulation of conventions or by solemn hanging on to the skirts of the latest scientific theory, is the only theme that can be legitimately developed by the novelist who is the chronicler of the adventures of mankind amongst the dangers of the kingdom of the earth.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>p. viii.

<sup>2</sup>"Books" in Notes on Life and Letters, p. 6.





In the famous preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus Conrad expresses himself emphatically as follows:

A work that aspires, however humbly, to the condition of art should carry its justification in every line. And art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect. It is an attempt to find in its forms, in its colors, in its light, in its shadows, in the aspect of matter and in the facts of life what of each is essential--their one illuminating and convincing quality--the very truth of their existence. The artist, then, like the thinker or the scientist, seeks the truth and makes his appeal.<sup>1</sup>

The thinker and the scientist appeal to our common-sense, to our intelligence, sometimes to our fears and prejudices--and we listen to them respectfully because they speak of obvious matters. It is somewhat different with the artist.

The artist appeals "to our less obvious capacities", to that part of our being which is aside from intellect and the more materialistic aspects of our lives. He appeals:

....to that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom: to that in us which is a gift and not an acquisition--and, therefore, more permanently enduring. He speaks to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation--and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity--the dead to the living and the living to the unborn.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>p. xi.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. xii.





Although this is not the material truth of the scientist, the artist owes it his allegiance. It is the truth about human souls, and unless he respects it he will become the victim of his own exaggeration, "losing the exact notion of sincerity, and in the end coming to despise truth itself as something too cold, too blunt, for his purpose--as, in fact, not good enough for his insistent emotion."<sup>1</sup>

One of the most interesting problems of criticism is to adjudge the proper boundaries of emotion, to determine where the powerful onrush of feelings in the artist should be checked and disciplined. There is a point beyond which the fine frenzy is wasted. Artists and critics alike know that creative expression, unless guided and channeled by the most delicate discrimination, may end in a maudlin and contemptible excess.

In respect to this element of reserve in art, Conrad expresses himself quite clearly. He is on the side of those modern humanists who preach the "inner check" on emotional display, as opposed to Bohemian license. Replying to a charge of sécheresse du coeur brought against him by some of his critics, he says:

My answer is that if it be true that every novel contains an element of autobiography--and this can hardly be denied, since the author can only express himself in his creation--then there are some of us to whom an open display of sentiment is repugnant. I would not unduly praise the

<sup>1</sup>A Personal Record, p. xx.





virtue of restraint. It is often merely temperamental. But it is not always a sign of coldness. It may be pride. There can be nothing more humiliating than to see the shaft of one's emotion miss the mark of either laughter or tears. Nothing more humiliating! And this for the reason that should the mark be missed, should the open display of emotion fail to move, then it must perish unavoidably in disgust and contempt. No artist can be reproached for shrinking from a risk which only fools run to meet and only genius dares confront with impunity. In a task which mainly consists in laying one's soul more or less bare to the world, a regard for decency, even one's own dignity which is inseparably united with the dignity of one's work.<sup>1</sup>

He declares humourously that he would like to hold the magic wand which commands laughter and tears, the wand which is declared to be the highest achievement of imaginative literature--but that to be a great magician one must surrender oneself to occult and irresponsible powers either outside or within one's breast. He says:

We have all heard of simple men selling their souls for love or power to some grotesque devil. The most ordinary intelligence can perceive without much reflection that anything of the sort is bound to be a fool's bargain. I don't lay claim to particular wisdom because of my dislike and distrust of such transactions. It may be my sea training acting upon a natural disposition to keep good hold on the one thing really mine, but the fact is that I have a positive horror of losing even for one moment that full possession of myself which is the first condition of good service. And I have carried my notion of good service from my earlier into my later existence. I, who have never sought in the written word anything else but a form of the Beautiful--I have carried over that article of creed from the decks of ships to the more circumscribed space of my desk, and by that act, I suppose, I have become permanently imperfect in the eyes of the inflexible company of pure esthetes.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>A Personal Record, pp. xvii-xviii.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. xx.





To keep possession of oneself, to keep a firm control over the emotions, sometimes involves coldness and lack of color. As F. M. Stawell says:

Conrad has hinted, a little wistfully, that his ideal of restraint in literature may have checked his power to wield 'the magic wand' giving command over laughter and tears.<sup>1</sup>

Conrad suspects that the artist who delights in depicting the extremities of emotion can often be accused of "the debasing touch of insincerity". He admits that in order to touch others deeply the writer must deliberately allow himself to exceed the bounds of his normal reactions, like the actor on the stage who raises his voice above the conversational pitch. But here a delicate problem confronts the artist: Can he surmount the barrier between himself and his audience by sharpening and focussing the emotional values in the situation, without running into the danger of stepping over the line and plunging into mere bathos? "From laughter and tears," says Conrad, "the descent is easy to snivelling and giggles."<sup>2</sup>

Yet this emotional self-containment of the writer need not result in dryness or detachment. It is merely a technique, an artistic ambition, for realizing a deeper appeal in one's work:

<sup>1</sup>"Conrad", in Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, p. 94.

<sup>2</sup>A Personal Record, p. xx.





An historian of hearts is not an historian of emotions, yet he penetrates further, restrained as he may be, since his aim is to reach the very fount of laughter and tears. The sight of human affairs deserves admiration and pity. They are worthy of respect, too. And he is not insensible who pays them the undemonstrative tribute of a sigh which is not a sob, and of a smile which is not a grin. Resignation, not mystic, not detached, but resignation open-eyed, conscious, and informed by love, is the only one of our feelings for which it is impossible to become a sham.<sup>1</sup>

Conrad recoiled from eccentricities in art with a quite unusual force. His insistence on restraint of the emotions is carried over to an insistence on decorum in literary methods and here he departs from the typical romanticist's views.

....At a time when nothing which is not revolutionary in some way or other can expect to attract much attention I have not been revolutionary in my writings. The revolutionary spirit is mighty convenient in this, that it frees one from all scruples as regards ideas. Its hard, absolute optimism is repulsive to my mind by the menace of fanaticism and intolerance it contains. No doubt one should smile at these things; but, imperfect Esthete, I am no better Philosopher. All claim to special righteousness awakens in me that scorn and anger from which a philosophical mind should be free....<sup>2</sup>

The element of reserve in Conrad is not so much a carefully formulated literary theory as a characteristic reaction, a reflection of his fear that his own ardent nature might become too undisciplined. Commenting on the epithet

<sup>1</sup>A Personal Record, p. xxi.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. xxii.





un puissant rêveur<sup>A</sup> which a certain critic had bestowed on him, he says:

So be it! Who would cavil at the words of a friendly reader? Yet perhaps not such an unconditional dreamer as all that. I will make bold to say that neither at sea nor ashore have I ever lost the sense of responsibility. Even before the most seductive reveries I have remained mindful of that sobriety of interior life, that asceticism of sentiment, in which alone the naked form of truth, such as one conceives it, such as one feels it, can be rendered without shame. It is but a maudlin and indecent verity that comes out through the strength of wine. I have tried to be a sober worker all my life--all my two lives. I did so from taste, no doubt, having an instinctive horror of losing my sense of full self-possession, but also from artistic conviction.<sup>1</sup>

Again, speaking of the various kinds of artists and their place in the world, he says:

Even the writer of prose, who in his less noble and more toilsome task should be a man with the steeled heart, is worthy of a place, providing he looks on with undimmed eyes and keeps laughter out of his voice, let who will laugh or cry. Yes! Even he, the prose artist of fiction, which after all is but truth often dragged out of a well and clothed in the painted robe of imaged phrases--.<sup>2</sup>

In the history of criticism--from Hobbes, Pope and Addison to Coleridge and Wordsworth, from Saintsbury to Richards--there is no single word which has been more earnestly defined than "imagination". It is one of those omnibus-words which carry a multitude of meanings. In Conrad's writing the word appears to mean simply the faculty of drawing a picture of reality which is tangible and recognizable to the beholder.

<sup>1</sup>A Personal Record, pp. 111-112.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 93.





It is a faculty of the highest importance in creative art, a magic which can unfold the most minute and subtle meanings of our existence.

In his Personal Record Conrad says:

Only in men's imagination does every truth find an effective and undeniable existence. Imagination, not invention, is the supreme master of art as of life. An imaginative and exact rendering of authentic memories may serve worthily that spirit of piety towards all things human which sanctions the conceptions of a writer of tales, and the emotions of the man reviewing his own experiences.<sup>1</sup>

Imagination, to Conrad, is an agency which can evoke the half-seen and dimly apprehended aspects of our lives as well as that which is familiar. It is, too, a source of enlightenment and edification for mankind, "pinned down by the conditions of its existence to the earnest consideration of the most insignificant tides of reality". This creative art of a writer of fiction may be compared

.....to rescue work carried out in darkness against cross gusts of wind swaying the action of a great multitude. It is rescue work, this snatching of vanishing phases of turbulence, disguised in fair words, out of the native obscurity into a light where the struggling forms may be seen, seized upon, endowed with the only possible form of permanence in this world of relative values--the permanence of memory. And the multitude feels it obscurely, too; since the demand of the individual to the artist is, in effect, the cry, "Take me out of myself!" meaning really, "but of my perishable activity into the light of imperishable consciousness."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> "Henry James" in Notes on Life and Letters, p. 14.





Imagination has a strong propulsive effect on the genuine creative artist. It is almost as if a command had been laid upon him to give voice to his vision, to gather about him those of his fellows who had the capacity for listening. In the most mysterious and complex situations in which men find themselves, it is the imaginative man who interprets, reassures, and inspires. In the over-dramatic manner which he sometimes assumes Conrad says:

The artist in his calling of interpreter creates (the clearest form of demonstration) because he must. He is so much of a voice that for him silence is like death; and the postulate was that there is a group alive, clustered on his threshold to watch the last flicker of light on a black sky, to hear the last word uttered in the stilled workshop of the world. It is safe to affirm that, if anybody, it will be the imaginative man who would be moved to speak on the eve of that day without tomorrow--whether in austere exhortation or in a phase of sardonic comment, who can guess?<sup>1</sup>

Interpretation, to Conrad, is much more than a matter of mere reportorial skill. The setting forth of the outward event is a somewhat mechanical exercise which can be achieved by anyone with a moderately quick eye and a facility of expression. The imaginative artist delves for the subtler meanings which lie below the surface--and this involves an effort which is often a cruel drain on him. Writing to Edward Noble as early as 1895 he counsels that aspiring writer as follows:

<sup>1</sup>"Henry James" in Notes on Life and Letters, pp. 16-17.





....you must treat events only as illustrative of human sensation,--as the outward sign of inward feelings,--of live feelings,--which alone are truly pathetic and interesting. You have much imagination: much more than I ever will have if I live to be a hundred years old. That much is clear to me. Well, that imagination (I wish I had it) should be used to create human souls: to disclose human hearts,--and not to create events that are properly speaking accidents only. To accomplish it you must cultivate your poetic faculty,--you must give yourself up to emotions (no easy task). You must squeeze out of yourself every sensation, every thought, every image,--mercilessly, without reserve and without remorse: you must search the darkest corners of your heart, the most remote recesses of your brain,--you must search them for the image, for the glamour, for the right expression. And you must do it sincerely, at any cost: you must do it so that at the end of your day's work you should feel exhausted, emptied of every sensation and every thought, with a blank mind and an aching heart, with the notion that there is nothing,--nothing left in you. To me it seems that it is the only way to achieve true distinction--even to go some way towards it.<sup>1</sup>

One attractive aspect of Conrad's criticism is that it is not coldly pontifical or entirely without some of those "imperfect sympathies" to which Charles Lamb so unashamedly confessed. While Conrad is not "the veriest thrall to sympathies, apathies, antipathies", he does admit blind spots in his faculty of appreciation, minor lapses which can be forgiven a man who is fundamentally consistent and well-armored.

He is, for example, rather insensitive to verse. One finds almost no criticism of poetry in all of his critical writings--not because he had not read much poetry, but probably because the rigid confinements of that medium oppressed his impulsive nature. He was also impatient with the requirements which writing for the stage imposes on would-be dramatists.

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, I, 277.





He cared little for Ibsen, Shaw, and Maeterlinck as dramatists, and the failure of his own plays indicates that he understood little of the psychology of the theater. His attitude toward the claims of science is one of amused skepticism,<sup>1</sup> and he seems to feel that science contributes only slightly to the achievement of a virtuous and effective life.

One can easily overlook these "imperfect sympathies". It is somewhat more difficult, however, to understand another deficiency in Conrad, that is, his denial of the importance of carefully reasoned thinking and reflection. Over and over again he insists on the validity of the "emotions" and the vital importance of "temperament", but he makes scant claims for intellect and rationality--he is content with what he calls "common-sense". He reminds one of Thomas Hardy in his tendency to look for bankrupt intellects, and would probably have pitied quite thoroughly such a character as Clym Yeobright, the Egdon schoolteacher whose face was so wasted by the "disease of thought".

The clearest expression of this viewpoint in Conrad comes in the Author's Note to Victory, where he is speaking of the meeting of Heyst with Jones, Ricardo, and Pedro:

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, "The Ascending Effort" and "The Life Beyond" in Notes on Life and Letters.





Behind this minute instance of life's hazards Heyst saw the power of blind destiny. Besides, Heyst in his fine detachment had lost the habit of asserting himself. I don't mean the courage of self-assertion, either moral or physical, but the mere way of it, the trick of the thing, the readiness of mind and the turn of the hand that come without reflection and lead the man to excellence in life, in art, in crime, in virtue, and for the matter of that, even in love. Thinking is the great enemy of perfection. The habit of profound reflection, I am compelled to say, is the most pernicious of all the habits formed by the civilized man.<sup>1</sup> [*Italics mine*]

When translated into critical theory, this antagonism to rationality, objectivity, and reflection tends to produce the impressionistic and individualistic in criticism. The "scientific" and "authoritarian" critic who objects to this impressionism maintains that subjective judgments are tainted and woefully fallible, that works of art should not be judged simply by the amount of pleasure they give. Man is a rational animal, he says, and must first of all use his reason. Conrad, however, is not convinced that man can judge a work of art by the methods of logic, or that he can produce a nicely articulated chain of reasoning. He feels that the coherence of such a carefully worked out system is illusory, that, as Anatole France ironically remarks, "it will last a dozen years".<sup>2</sup>

Conrad, in his view of the illusory nature of the world of experience and the superiority of the senses over the conscious intellect, indicates that he owes something to Anatole France, who, it will be remembered, proclaims that reality and appearance are one, that to love and suffer in this world,

<sup>1</sup>p. x-xi.

<sup>2</sup>cf. "The Guarded Secret", reprinted in A Modern Book of Criticism, ed. by Ludwig Lewisohn, p. 6.





images suffice. Certain observations of Conrad are almost certainly derived from such paragraphs as the following:

....In whatever fashion one conceives of life, and though one knows it to be the dream of a dream--one lives. That is all we need to found sciences, arts, moralities, impressionistic and, if you please, objective criticism....As a matter of fact, we see the world only through the medium of our senses which shape and colour it as they please....One cannot foresee today, whatever one may say, a time when criticism will have the rigourousness of a positive science.<sup>1</sup>

In the strictly literal sense Conrad does not mean, of course, that reason and reflection are unnecessary to the creative artist. And he would be quite willing to qualify his statement that "thinking is the great enemy of perfection". He himself was only too well aware of the painful thinking and intense reflection that is required of the sincere and conscientious artist, and his letters to his friends are full of complaints about the mental toil which drained his strength as he strove to accomplish his artistic objectives.

What he does mean is that the finest fruits of a literary genius come as a result of tremendous and spontaneous releases of creative ardor. That is, he seems to half-believe in the "divine fury" of the Greeks, an uplifting of the spirit which enables an artist to tell great truths eloquently. Mere knowledge, mere intellect, mere science--these things in themselves are valueless to the artist unless he has a sensitive realization of himself and a keen perception of the drama

<sup>1</sup>Anatole France, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.





and pity of the universe. As one writer on Conrad's philosophy of life says:

Conrad implies, it would seem, that intellectual capacity and "education" as commonly understood are mere ineffectual trappings if the disposition is not the soil into which their roots extend. Ignorance may be defined as lack of self-knowledge. It does not refer to superficiality of information, but to that of self.<sup>1</sup>

Although Conrad cannot be classed as a humanist of the modern American type, he resembles the school in at least one respect--he recoils from facile humanitarianism. There is very little sympathy with any particular social program or political philosophy in his novels. Even in the so-called "political" novels like The Arrow of Gold or The Secret Agent, his purpose is not to further a cause, but rather to show the ugliness or pathos of various revolutionary characters. His intention is not hortatory, and he is not contemptuous of these characters--he sees in them merely a misguided bravery or a spiritual deficiency which makes them interesting subjects for a novel. He is concerned with private anarchy rather than with public anarchy, with the distress of individual consciences rather than with the economic distress of slum-dwellers.

Chevalley sums up this characteristic as follows:

Joseph Conrad repudiates philosophy and science as the guides of invention, and consequently fore-swears all books with a thesis....Thus does he separate himself from the majority of the great English

<sup>1</sup>Bancroft, Joseph Conrad, His Philosophy of Life, p. 10.





novelists of the nineteenth century. And, indeed, there is in his work no general idea, no claim, no doctrine, protestation or social satire, no political or religious "tendency". His characters are what they are, distinct, varied, profoundly individual; but they form no basis for possible generalization. He creates men, not types. He abstains from all that may seem praise or blame. With Conrad we are a thousand leagues from Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot and all the contemporary English authors who, directly or indirectly, intervene in their narratives. Nor are we closer to the realists who serve up a slice of life with the same indifference that an innkeeper serves up a slice of veal. On the contrary, his doctrine, his genius, and his practice lead him to imprint the most intense personality upon pages that are apparently the most impersonal.<sup>1</sup>

Conrad was aware of this moralizing tendency in English novelists, this denunciatory treatment of the ills of society. In an essay entitled "The Enterprise of Writing a Book", which was published in Living Age magazine,<sup>2</sup> he writes:

....the distinctively English novelist is always at his best in denunciations of institutions, of types, or of conventionalized society. It is comparatively easy for us, when we are really moved by the clearness of our vision, to convince an audience that Messrs. A, B, and C are callous, ferocious, or cowardly. We should have to use much more conscious art to give a permanent impression of those gentlemen as purely altruist....It is perhaps not so much that these distinguished writers were completely incapable of loving their fellow men simply as men, exposed to suffering, temptation, and affliction, as that, neglecting the one indispensable thing, neglecting to use their powers of selection and observation, they emotionally excelled in rendering the disagreeable. And that is easy. To find beauty, grace, charm, in the bitterness of truth is a graver task.

<sup>1</sup>The Modern English Novel, p. 183.

<sup>2</sup>Issue of September 5, 1925, pp.514-17.





With those modern writers who must bring the exactitude of sociology and the precision of anthropology to their art, Conrad has little sympathy. In 1921 he wrote to Edward Garnett:

Science at its amplest (and profoundest) is only the exercise of a certain kind of imagination springing either from facts eminently prosaic or from tentative assumptions of the commonest kind of common-sense.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, the art which is merely documentation for the purpose of reforming society or pointing a moral is a lesser form of art. Conrad never slipped into didacticism for its own sake, nor did he believe that special pleading was the highest goal of art. As Crankshaw says:

Lord Jim illustrates no thesis; the only thesis of the book is Jim himself, pre-occupation with whom necessitates the taking into account in an inconclusive manner certain issues of a moral nature.<sup>2</sup>

While he was not concerned with a narrow, special morality, Conrad was quite ready to admit that an artist must make basic moral judgments, that characters have elemental moral significance. In writing of the reception which friendly critics gave to one of his novels, he says:

To be told that better things have been expected of one may be soothing in view of how many better things one had expected from oneself in this art which, in these days, is no longer justified by the assumption, somewhere and somehow, of a didactic purpose.

<sup>1</sup>Garnett, Letters From Joseph Conrad, p. 277.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Conrad, p. 51.





I do not mean to hint that nobody has ever done me the injury (I don't mean insult, I mean injury) of charging a single one of my pages with didactic purpose. But every subject in the region of intellect and emotion must have a morality of its own if it is treated at all sincerely; and even the most artful of writers will give himself (and his morality) away in about every third sentence. The various shades of moral significance which have been discovered in my writings are very numerous. None of them, however, had provoked a hostile manifestation. It may have happened to me to sin against the basic feelings and elementary convictions which make life possible to the mass of mankind and, by establishing a standard of judgment, set their idealism free to look for plainer ways, for higher feelings, for deeper purposes.<sup>1</sup>

While insisting that art should not serve the narrow purposes of a particular sect or dogma, Conrad does not claim for the artist the dangerous license of moral Nihilism, and he warns of the arrogance of a declared pessimism. He declares:

That frame of mind is not the proper one in which to approach seriously the art of fiction. It gives an author--goodness only knows why--an elated sense of his own superiority. And there is nothing more dangerous than such an elation to that absolute loyalty towards his feelings and sensations an author should keep hold of in his most exalted moments of creation.<sup>2</sup>

Rather than moral negation, the artist must make many acts of faith "of which the first would be the cherishing of an undying hope; and hope, it will not be contested, implies all the piety of effort and renunciation. It is the

<sup>1</sup>Chance, Author's Note (1920) pp. xi-xii.

<sup>2</sup> "Books" in Notes on Life and Letters, pp.8-9.





God-sent form of trust in the magic force and inspiration belonging to the life of this earth." Then, with characteristic austerity, Conrad adds:

To be hopeful in an artistic sense it is not necessary to think that the world is good. It is enough to believe that there is no impossibility of its being made so. If the flight of imaginative thought may be allowed to rise superior to many moralities current amongst mankind, a novelist who would think himself of a superior essence to other men would miss the first condition of his calling. To have the gift of words is no such great matter. A man furnished with a long-range weapon does not become a hunter or a warrior by the mere possession of a fire-arm: many other qualities of character and temperament are necessary to make him either one or the other. Of him from whose armoury of phrases one in a hundred may perhaps hit the far-distant and elusive mark of art I would ask that in his dealings with mankind he should be capable of giving a tender recognition to their obscure virtues. I would not have him impatient with their small failings and scornful of their errors. I would not have him expect too much gratitude from that humanity whose fate, as illustrated in individuals, it is open to him to depict as ridiculous or terrible. I would wish him to look with a large forgiveness at men's ideas and prejudices, which are by no means the outcome of malevolence, but depend on their education, their social status, even their professions.<sup>1</sup>

If the artist consistently and faithfully records his own experiences and observations, then he is moral in the highest sense. In describing the writing of Maupassant Conrad says:

The interest of a reader in a work of imagination is either ethical or that of simple curiosity. Both are perfectly legitimate, since there is both a

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 9.





moral and an excitement to be found in a faithful rendering of life. And in Maupassant's work there is the interest of curiosity and the moral of a point of view consistently preserved and never obtruded for the end of personal gratification.<sup>1</sup>

Although he admits that the creative artist evinces a morality in every exercise of his art--a morality which springs from the mere fact that he is employed in using his best faculties in a strenuous and sincere effort--Conrad is curiously reluctant to accept an ethical view of the universe. In A Personal Record he says:

....The ethical view of the universe involves us at last in so many cruel and absurd contradictions, where the last vestiges of faith, hope, and charity, and even of reason itself, seem ready to perish, that I have come to suspect that the aim of creation cannot be ethical at all. I would fondly believe that its object is purely spectacular: a spectacle for awe, love, adoration, or hate, if you like, but in this view--and in this view alone--never for despair! Those visions, delicious or poignant, are a moral end in themselves.<sup>2</sup>

As W. W. Bancroft puts it, in writing of Conrad's philosophy:

The Cosmos is non-ethical. It offers a background at once indifferent and unordered, against which the consciousness of man, as expressed in his hopes, will, ambitions, plays a drama of tragic significance. Though man is subject to the same cosmic forces affecting brute existence, he is a spectator who may add his own valuation to experience, and determines his own moral relations. Unlike the brutes that perish, it is his to mould the plastic stuff of ideas into meaningful relations.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"Guy de Maupassant" in Notes on Life and Letters, pp. 26-29.

<sup>2</sup>p. 92.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Conrad, His Philosophy of Life, p. 13.





In other words Conrad seems to be tempted into the simple view that right and wrong are hopelessly involved, that ethical concepts are merely relative, and that man can best meet this universe of shifting values by a stoical fortitude, by a refusal to despair. The appointed task of the artist is not to distinguish ethical values but to apply an unwearied, self-forgetful attention to every phase of the living universe reflected in his consciousness. This task is one in which

....Fate has perhaps engaged nothing of us except our conscience, gifted with a voice in order to bear true testimony to the visible wonder, the haunting terror, the infinite passion and the illimitable serenity; to the supreme law and the abiding mystery of the sublime spectacle.<sup>1</sup>

In this view of life there is ample allowance for all creeds except "the inverted creed of impiety, the mask and cloak of arid despair." The great aim of the artist is to remain true to the emotions invoked by the magnitude and wonder of the universe. In a purely spectacular universe there is also room of inspiration of every sort, and the artist of every kind finds a rightful place. With mock humility Conrad even includes the writer of prose:

....even he has his place amongst kings, demagogues, priests, charlatans, dukes, giraffes, Cabinet Ministers, Fabians, bricklayers, apostles, ants, scientists, Kaffirs, soldiers, sailors, elephants, lawyers, dandies, microbes and constellations of a universe whose amazing spectacle is a moral end in itself.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>A Personal Record, p. 92.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 93.





But Conrad refuses to speculate very deeply on this matter of morality, and he seems to lack the desire to engage in lengthy, finely-spun abstractions. In the preface to A Personal Record he says:

Those who read me know my conviction that the world, the temporal world, rests on a very few simple ideas; so simple that they must be as old as the hills. It rests notably, among others, on the idea of Fidelity.<sup>1</sup>

Again, in the Author's Note to Chance he expresses his pleasure at the wide reception of this book, since he feared that he was drifting unconsciously "into the position of a writer for a limited coterie; a position which would have been odious to me as throwing a doubt on the soundness of my belief in the solidarity of all mankind in simple ideas and in simple emotions."<sup>2</sup>

To sum up the matter, one can say that there is little social evangelism in Conrad, he does not write novels to illustrate a social thesis, and he is not desirous of championing a particular set of morals. He recognizes the larger morality which is resident in all sincere works of art--indeed, in all human experience--and he would not countenance moral Nihilism. He believes that the artist should make many acts of faith, including a trust in the vitality and inspiration of life on this earth. There is also a form of morality in the conscientious use of one's best faculties in creating a

<sup>1</sup>p. xxi.

<sup>2</sup>p. x-xi.





work of art. He finds it difficult to believe in an ethical universe and does not assign to the artist the task of distinguishing ethical values. In his view of the world there is room for all sorts of creeds except despair.





## Chapter IV

## CONRAD'S VIEWS CONCERNING THE PROPER FUNCTION OF THE NOVEL

In the foregoing chapter we have outlined Conrad's philosophy of art--those general overlying conceptions which color and direct his work. Presumably every artist who is at all thoughtful and speculative about his creative achievements holds to some sort of credo or philosophy of art. This need not be necessarily a carefully formulated matter; it may be simply an instinctive or partly articulated assumption. It is much easier for most men to class themselves as "Republicans" or Democrats" than to place themselves accurately in this or that school of art.

We have seen that Conrad, although he is not primarily an aesthete or a philosopher, does have a fairly clear conception of the nature and functions of art. He sorts out various central principles to which he believes the good artist should be devoted. But he also has, in addition to a general philosophy which could be a guide for all creative endeavor, a particular set of assumptions relating to his own special province--the art of the novel. It is a form of "practical" criticism, since it concerns his observations of his own practice and that of his fellow craftsmen. Altogether, it makes an interesting handbook for the edification of those who would attempt the difficult enterprise of writing a novel.





Several critics, especially Crankshaw, Megroz, Curle, and Ford, have written discerning evaluations of Conrad's methods. The present writer is interested primarily in what Conrad actually said about his technique; therefore the greater part of this section will merely set forth Conrad's critical ideas about the construction of the novels. The evaluation of these ideas, and a brief description of their application to specific novels, will appear toward the end of the chapter.

Although he occasionally expressed irritation when asked to discuss the true aim of a novelist, Conrad was nevertheless keenly interested in the question. He was very serious about the high mission of a good novelist, and running through all of his critical writing--whether he was in a sardonic, angry, or mirthful mood--there is a definite concern about the ultimate effect of his novels upon his readers.

With literary poseurs, especially when they were women, Conrad maintained a frigid composure, although inwardly seething. When someone asked him, probably in a gushing fashion, what the aim of The Rescue was, he described his reaction in a letter to Hugh R. Dent, dated June 24, 1920.

On returning home yesterday I found an absurd wire from the--asking me to say whether that forthcoming book of mine had in it "any message for the young". Could anything be more silly than such an inquiry and, especially to a man like me who had never flapped any "message" in the face of the world? I was sorely tempted to answer that it all





depended whether the "young" in question was an ass or not. But I controlled my feelings and wired a reply to the effect that "in a work exclusively artistic in its aim to appeal to emotions there should be something for everybody, young or old, who was at all susceptible to aesthetic impressions." I don't know what else I could have said and remained polite at the same time.<sup>1</sup>

When he was properly approached by qualified persons, however, Conrad was quite willing to discuss his literary aims. In a letter to Richard Curle he says:

I am quite aware that people usually regard a novelist's opinions on his own work as an amusing freak rather than as a serious contribution to criticism, but if a laborer is worthy of his hire I cannot see why a novelist should not be worthy of a hearing.<sup>2</sup>

Conrad was always honest enough not to make flippant or hasty remarks about his work, realizing that art is partly a matter of temperament--and temperament is not easy to analyze. When someone from the office of Methuen & Co. asked him to define the meaning of one of his early novels, he wrote:

You ask me something very difficult. Any definition of one's work must be either very intimate or very superficial. There is only one man to whom I could open my confidence on that extremely elusive matter without the fear of being misunderstood. The intention of temperamental writing is infinitely complex, and to talk about my work is repugnant to me--beyond anything. And what could I say that would be of use to you? I may say that the book is an imaginative rendering of a reminiscent mood. This is a sort of definition and it is true enough in a way. But the book is also a record of a phase, now nearly vanished, of a certain kind of activity, sympathetic to the inhabitants of this Island. It is likewise an attempt to set down graphically certain genuine feelings and emotions born from the experience of

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, II., 242.

<sup>2</sup>Curle, The Last Twelve Years of Joseph Conrad, p. 80.





a respectable and useful calling, which, at the same time, happens to be of national importance. It may be defined as a discourse (with a personal note) on ships, seamen, and the sea.<sup>1</sup>

He has a further word about temperament in fiction in the preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus:

Fiction--if it at all aspires to be art--appeals to temperament. And in truth it must be, like painting, like music, like all art, the appeal of one temperament to all the other innumerable temperaments whose subtle and resistless power endows passing events with their true meaning, and creates the moral, the emotional atmosphere of the time and place. Such an appeal to be effective must be an impression conveyed through the senses; and, in fact, it cannot be made in any other way, because temperament, whether individual or collective, is not amenable to persuasion.<sup>2</sup>

This is but another expression of the Conradian idea that the senses and the emotions, rather than the intellect and the reason, are the avenues by which the creative artist approaches his audience. A simple projection of this idea brings one to the point of believing that there is no fixed criteria for judging literature and art, that the appeal of a work of art is at best a relative and shifting one, that most judgments are subjective, and that the personal equation is likely to lead to all sorts of contradictions among critics.

Conrad's ideas concerning the proper function of the novelist can be treated most clearly and specifically by quoting a number of excerpts from various sources, and then summarizing these observations.

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, II., 34.

<sup>2</sup>p. xiii.





In A Personal Record he writes:

What is it that Novalis says? "It is certain my conviction gains infinitely the moment another soul will believe in it." And what is a novel if not a conviction of our fellow-men's existence strong enough to take upon itself a form of imagined life clearer than reality and whose accumulated verisimilitude of selected episodes puts to shame the pride of documentary history.<sup>1</sup>

From the essay on Henry James comes this paragraph:

Neither his fellows, nor his gods, nor his passions will leave a man alone. In virtue of these allies and enemies, he holds his precarious dominion, he possesses his fleeting significance; and it is this relation, in all its manifestations, great and little, superficial or profound, and this relation alone, that is commented upon, interpreted, demonstrated by the art of the novelist in the only possible way in which the task can be performed: by the independent creation of circumstance and character, achieved against all the difficulties of expression, in an imaginative effort finding its inspiration from the reality of forms and sensations.<sup>2</sup>

In a letter to Sir Sidney Colvin, dated March 18, 1917, he writes:

Perhaps you won't find it presumption if, after 22 years of work, I may say that I have not been very well understood. I have been called a writer of the sea, of the tropics, a descriptive writer, a romantic writer--and also a realist. But as a matter of fact all my concern has been with the "ideal" value of things, events and people. That and nothing else. The humorous, the pathetic, the passionate, the sentimental aspects came in of themselves--mais en vérité c'est les valeurs idéales des faits et gestes humains qui se sont imposés a mon activité artistique.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>p. 15.

<sup>2</sup>Notes on Life and Letters, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, II., 85.





Writing to E. V. Lucas in October, 1908, he says:

A good book is a good action. It has more than the force of good example. And if the moralist will say that it has less merit--let him. Indeed we are not writing for the salvation of our own souls. "A man should not be tame" says the Spanish proverb, and I would say: An author is not a monk. Yet a man who puts forth the secret of his imagination to the world accomplishes, as it were, a religious rite.<sup>1</sup>

In another part of the essay on Henry James he speaks of the difficulty of seizing upon the vanishing aspects of reality:

All creative art is magic, is evocation of the unseen in forms persuasive, enlightening, familiar and surprising, for the edification of mankind, pinned down by the conditions of its existence to the earnest consideration of the most insignificant tides of reality.

Action in its essence, the creative art of a writer of fiction may be compared to rescue work carried out in darkness against cross gusts of wind swaying the action of a great multitude. It is rescue work, this snatching of vanishing phases of turbulence, disguised in fair words, out of the native obscurity into a light where the struggling forms may be seen, seized upon, endowed with the only possible form of permanence in this world of relative values--the permanence of memory. And the multitude feels it obscurely too; since the demand of the individual to the artist is, in effect, the cry, "Take me out of myself!" meaning really, out of my perishable activity into the light of imperishable consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

In the same essay he compares the novelist to the historian:

In one of his critical studies, published some fifteen years ago, Mr. Henry James claims for the novelist the standing of the historian as the only adequate one, as for himself and before his audience. I think that the claim cannot be contested, and that the position

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., II, 89.

<sup>2</sup>Notes on Life and Letters, p. 13.





is unassailable. Fiction is history, human history, or it is nothing. But it is also more than that; it stands on firmer ground, being based on the reality of forms and the observation of social phenomena, whereas history is based on documents, and the reading of print and handwriting--on second-hand impression. Thus fiction is nearer truth. But let that pass. A historian may be an artist too, and a novelist is a historian, the preserver, the keeper, the expounder, of human experience. As is meet for a man of his descent and tradition, Mr. Henry James is the historian of fine consciences.<sup>1</sup>

Conrad believes, then, that the novelist is a critic who is intensely aware of the tides of life flowing around him. This awareness is not a thing learned, a sort of conscious observation such as a detective uses in his work. It is, rather, a natural perceptiveness arising from the conviction that human life is immensely significant, that the life of our neighbor has its effect on us. Observing the streams of men in their multifarious activities, their complicated motives and tangled purposes, the novelist reduces this reality to a form where it can be seized upon intelligibly. He presents a new picture of life which, although "idealized", does not lack verisimilitude.

For the novelist, what is significant in man? It is his relation with his fellow man, the impact of his character upon the society in which he lives. It is also the quality of the gods he believes in, the causes which he espouses, and the loyalties which he embraces. It is also the passions and appetites which degrade or inspire him. All of these matters await the comment and interpretation of the novelist.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 16-17.





The only way in which he performs his task is to create a new synthesis of character and circumstance out of the reality which lies before him. With the full force of imagination he selects and combines the elements, looking for the "ideal" value of men, events, and institutions. To Conrad these ideals are few and simple, being based primarily on the quality of Fidelity.

He believes that there is something almost magical in the power of the gifted novelist to evoke images whose presence had not been suspected before, to reveal aspects of the world around us which we were too busy or too blind to see. We are persuaded to give over for a moment our preoccupation with material cares and to watch a drama which is not our own, yet is familiar to us. Like all artists, the novelist takes us out of ourselves, and presents us with a new universe which surprises us and yet pleases us by its correspondence with our own experiences. Significant bits of the turbulent and puzzling world are rescued and held up to our view in a more or less permanent way, and we are better able to preserve them in our memory. Thus the writing of a good book is a good action. Conrad even invests it with seriousness of a religious rite.

Conrad also claims for the novelist the status of a historian, since fiction is a form of human history. He does not imply that it is a history bulwarked by a mass of





documentation and research, but that it has a validity of its own. As Stevenson would say, it does not have to be true so long as it is typical. Conrad makes the familiar point of Aristotle that the artist's story has even more power than the account of the historian. Like the historian, the novelist preserves and interprets human experience. Henry James, according to Conrad, is "the historian of fine consciences".

That Conrad embarked on the career of writing novels with a high purpose is indicated by the foregoing excerpts. He speaks of his craft with dignity and eloquence, and he pursued it with the most painstaking application.





## Chapter V

CONRAD'S CRITICISM OF THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL AND ITS  
ILLUSTRATION FROM HIS OWN PRACTICE

It is generally thought that one reason for the unwillingness of the public to accept Conrad, at least in the first decade of his writing career, was the indirect and often unexpected course of his plots. Readers were confused by his sudden transitions and irritated by what seemed an arbitrary development of the action. At the present time this opposition does not seem to be very pronounced, probably because the novel, which has always been a more or less amorphous literary type, exhibits nowadays a fluidity and looseness of structure which makes Conrad seem comparatively orderly. After James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Thomas Wolfe, Conrad does not offer any particular difficulty as far as sequence of action is concerned. It becomes apparent, also, that Conrad had definite artistic reasons for writing as he did.

It is the purpose of this chapter to produce those reasons. In discussing his theory we shall use the conventional grouping of plot, character drawing, setting and atmosphere, and style quality. Our first point of discussion will be plot. The word "plot" will be taken to mean simply the framework and arrangement of the action, with the emphasis on causality rather than on time sequence.





We shall be concerned not with the relative merits of his novels, but rather with the orderly description of his theory as expressed in his own words.

The first point is that to Conrad the quality of invention--the "fable"--is less important than the achievement of imaginative fidelity. We have his own words on this point in A Personal Record:

Only in men's imagination does every truth find an effective and undeniable existence. Imagination, not invention, is the supreme master of art, as of life. An imaginative and exact rendering of authentic memories may serve worthily that spirit of piety toward all things human which sanctions the conceptions of a writer of tales, and the emotions of a man reviewing his own experiences.<sup>1</sup>

He does not insist on the events, but only on their reaction on the characters in the novel. In the Author's Note to Falk he says:

"Falk"--the second story in the volume--offended the delicacy of one critic at least by certain peculiarities of its subject. But what is the subject of "Falk". I personally do not feel so very certain about it. He who reads must find out for himself. My intention in writing "Falk" was not to shock anybody. As in most of my writings I insist not on the events but on their effect on the persons in the tale.

(Italics mine) But in everything I have written there is always one invariable intention, and that is to capture the reader's attention, by securing his interest and enlisting his sympathies for the matter in hand, whatever it may be, within the limits of the visible world and within the boundaries of human emotion.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>A Personal Record, p. x.

<sup>2</sup>pp. ix-x. (This story was published in the volume Typhoon).





In answer to a certain critic who had recognized the autobiographical element in The Arrow of Gold, Conrad admits frankly that the novel was based on fact, and not on invented incidents.

I venture this explicit statement because, amidst much sympathetic appreciation, I have detected here and there a note, as it were, of suspicion. Suspicion of facts concealed, of explanations held back, of inadequate motives. But what is lacking in the facts is simply what I did not know, and what is not explained is what I did not understand myself, and what seems inadequate is the fault of my imperfect insight. And all that I could not help. In the case of this book I was unable to supplement these deficiencies by the exercise of my inventive faculty. It was never very strong; and on this occasion its use would have seemed exceptionally dishonest. (*Italics mine*) It is from the ethical motive and not from timidity that I elected to keep strictly within the limits of unadorned sincerity and to try to enlist the sympathies of my readers without assuming lofty omniscience or descending to the subterfuge of exaggerated emotions.<sup>1</sup>

The mere events, then, are only a medium for the expression of the author's temperament and his view of human beings. In a letter to Edward Noble, Conrad says:

Only, my dear Noble, do not throw yourself away in fables. Remember that death is not the most pathetic--the most poignant thing--, and you must treat events only as illustrative of human sensation,--as the outward sign of inward feelings,--which alone are truly pathetic and interesting.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Arrow of Gold, Author's Note, p. ix.

<sup>2</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, I, 182.





Other typical Conrad devices are looseness of plot structure, recessions in time sequence, doubling back to pick up loose threads in the narrative, delayed exposition, and unexpected groupings of events. The inexperienced reader objects to these devices, and it must be admitted that Conrad is not always successful in handling them. Nevertheless he has an answer for those who want an explicit and orderly story. He contends that grace may well lie in obscurity, and that literalness and explicitness may well destroy illusion. The normal chronological sequence of events may lack overtones and richness of texture.<sup>1</sup>

What Conrad is doing, of course, is giving expression to the theory of the "slice-of-life" writers when he says that life does not fall into neat patterns with carefully arranged climaxes at proper intervals. No action is complete, no story can be told entirely.

To a critic who had complained of the diffuseness of the novel Chance, Conrad replies:

Captain Anthony's determination led him a long and roundabout course and that is why this book is a long book. That the course was of my own choosing I will not deny. A critic has remarked that if I had selected another method of composition and taken a little more trouble the tale could have been told in about two hundred pages. I confess I do not see exactly the bearings of such criticism or even

<sup>1</sup>F. M. Ford, in his Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance, has a discussion of the time-shift devices which Conrad used. Edward Crankshaw discusses the thinness of the usual chronological handling and Conrad's use of the inverted time order in his Joseph Conrad, p. 170 et seq.





the use of such a remark. No doubt that by selecting a certain method and taking great pains the whole story might have been written out on a cigarette paper. For that matter, the whole history of mankind could be written thus if only approached with sufficient detachment. The history of men on this earth since the beginning of ages may be resumed in one phrase of infinite poignancy: They were born, they suffered, they died....Yet it is a great tale! But in the infinitely minute stories about men and women it is my lot on earth to narrate I am not capable of such detachment.<sup>1</sup>

In defence of the incompleteness of the action in The Nigger of the Narcissus, he writes to Edward Garnett on November 24, 1896:

Let it be unpopular, it must be. But it seems to me that the thing--precious as it is to me--is trivial enough on the surface to have some charm for the man in the street. As to lack of incident, well--it's life. The incomplete joy, the incomplete suffering. Events crowd and push, and nothing happens. You know what I mean. Unless in a boy's book of adventures. Mine were never finished.<sup>2</sup>

The conscious artifice underlying the apparent looseness of the novels is revealed after close scrutiny. As Conrad says in a letter to Richard Curle,<sup>3</sup> "the thought for effects is there all the same (often at the cost of mere directness of narrative) and can be detected in my unconventional grouping and perspective...." It is his theory that this grouping is purely temperamental, and he even goes so far as to say that his "art" consists almost entirely in this temperamental handling of events. He suggests that herein lies the

<sup>1</sup>Chance, Author's Note, p. x.

<sup>2</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, I, 97.

<sup>3</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, II, 282.





difficulty the critics sometimes feel in classifying his work as realistic or romantic, whereas, as a matter of fact, "it is fluid, depending on grouping (sequence) which shifts, and on the changing lights giving varied effects of perspective."

Since the grouping of the events is complicated in Conrad's novels, it is a matter of interest to observe the "angles of narration" from which Conrad works. He constantly occupied himself with the problem: Who is to tell the story, and where will he be when he tells it? Will the author himself tell it, or will one of the characters who acts as protagonist? Or a minor character? Or a diary? Will the narrative be subjective or objective?

Sometimes the difficulty of the problem oppressed Conrad sorely. A good example is The Rescue, a novel which took him twenty years to write! He laid it aside at the end of the summer of 1898 and, as he says, "it was about the end of the summer of 1918 that I took it up again with the firm determination to see the end of it and helped by the sudden feeling that I might be equal to the task".<sup>1</sup>

He temporarily abandoned this novel<sup>2</sup> because of a growing sense of the difficulty of handling it, because he had lost a clear idea of what angle of narration to take.

<sup>1</sup>The Rescue, Author's Note, p. ix.

<sup>2</sup>Edward Garnett points out (Letters From Joseph Conrad, p. 23) that Conrad's letters show that "he was struggling ineffectually to write The Rescue, off and on, for a year and a half."





He says:

But as to the way of presenting the facts, and perhaps in a certain measure as to the nature of the facts themselves, I had many doubts. I mean the telling, representative facts, helpful to carry on the idea, and, at the same time, of such a nature as not to demand an elaborate creation of the atmosphere to the detriment of the action....What I had lost for the moment was the sense of the proper formula of expression, the only formula that would suit.<sup>1</sup>

No such problem arose with The Secret Agent. Conrad "began this book impulsively and wrote it continuously". He had just finished writing Nostromo and The Mirror of the Sea, and suddenly the tale of The Secret Agent came to him in the shape of a few words spoken by a friend in a casual discussion about anarchist activities. The inspiration was strengthened by his reading of the recollections of an English police official. Then against the London background the character of Winnie Verloc appeared dramatically and sharply. Other characters emerged from shreds of his memory, and the story was on its way "to its anarchistic end of utter desolation, madness, and despair". Here the angle of narration was settled without the tribulation involved in The Rescue.

In any case Conrad was deeply concerned with the management of his plots, the grouping of events, and the angle from which the story should be told. His aim was imaginative verisimilitude; sometimes he is more successful than at other times, but he usually persuades all except the most exacting readers to suspend their disbelief at least momentarily.

<sup>1</sup>The Rescue, Author's Note, p. x.





Conrad believed that in plot construction the most intense effort was necessary in order to achieve verisimilitude, and the proper grouping of events for the greatest emphasis and suspense. Since mere action, in his view, was subordinate to the revelation of character, what action there was had to be carefully chosen for its illustrative value. To any reader of Conrad's agonized letters to his friends, it is perfectly apparent what pains he took, not only with plot construction, but with style. Frequently he complains that he must re-write, clarify his conception, re-work the plot. Writing to Edward Garnett in 1895 he wails (in reference to The Outcast):

I am glad you like the XXIII chapter. To tell you the honest truth I like it myself. As to the XXIV I feel that the right course would be to destroy it, to scatter its ashes to the four winds of heaven. The only question is: can I?

I am afraid I can't! I lack the courage to set before myself the task of rewriting the thing. It is not--as you say--a matter of correction here and there--a matter of changed words--or lines--or pages. The whole conception seems to me wrong. I seem to have seen the wrong side of the situation. I was always afraid of it. For months I have been afraid of that chapter--and now it is written--and the foreboding is realized in a dismal failure.<sup>1</sup>

One mitigating circumstance in Conrad's problem was that his plots were founded largely upon fact, as we have demonstrated, and his memory of these facts was astonishing. He rarely took notes and his diary material was very scanty; yet he could, with bitter effort, resurrect the fact and place

<sup>1</sup>Garnett, Letters From Joseph Conrad, p. 41.





it within the plot structure. In this connection Jean-Aubry writes (in reference to Nostromo):

He barely brushed these tropical lands in passing when he was a boy of eighteen. Yet it was from these impressions alone that he could draw the visual portion of these American books, which he wrote more than thirty years afterward. This capacity for reconstruction appears with a force and grandeur that seem those of genius in Nostromo....his masterpiece both for the strength of its suggestion and the beauty of its style....<sup>1</sup>

Conrad has a graceful word here and there in acknowledgement of his wife's efforts to solve the mechanical difficulties which harassed him--such annoyances as unwelcome visitors and other physical discomforts. Once, while engaged in the desperate labor of reducing Nostromo to manageable proportions, he was interrupted by the well-meaning but uncomprehending daughter of a general. He describes rather humourously how the characters were killed and the whole setting shattered by this invasion of "the even flow of daily life, made easy and noiseless for me by a silent, watchful, tireless affection"--but one feels that such interruptions were really serious when one reads his description of the labor of creating this story.

....All I know, is that, for twenty months, neglecting the common joys of life that fall to the lot of the humblest on this earth, I had, like the prophet of old, "wrestled with the Lord" for my creation, for the headlands of the coast, for the darkness of the Placid Gulf, the light on the snows, the clouds on the sky, and for the breath of life that had to be blown into the shapes of men and women, of Latin and Saxon, of Jew and Gentile. These are, perhaps, strong words, but it is difficult to characterize otherwise the intimacy and the strain of a creative effort in which mind and will and conscience

<sup>1</sup>La Revue de l'Amerique Latine, April, 1923 (Quoted in Living Age Magazine, 317: 350-5, May 12, 1923.





are engaged to the full, hour after hour, day after day, away from the world, and to the exclusion of all that makes life really lovable and gentle-- something for which a material parallel can only be found in the everlasting sombre stress of the westward winter passage around Cape Horn. For that too is the wrestling of men with the might of their Creator, in a great isolation from the world, without the amenities and consolations of life, a lonely struggle under a sense of over-matched littleness, for no reward that could be adequate, but for the mere winning of a longitude. Yet a certain longitude, once won, cannot be disputed. The sun and the stars and the shape of your earth are the witness of your gain; whereas a handful of pages, no matter how much you have made them your own, are at best but an obscure and questionable spoil....<sup>1</sup>

A little sidelight on Conrad's method of plot building is seen in a quotation from R. L. Megroz, who once asked Conrad how he built his plots.

"How can I say?" he replied. "I used often to spend a whole day doing nothing at all. My wife understood that I was hatching something. It is not that the plot comes while I am writing. There is always a certain amount of premonition of what is going to happen. I work up to it."<sup>2</sup>

In an ironic fling at a certain genteel critic who described novels about strange people and far places as "decivilized", Conrad once said:

The critic and the judge seem to think that in those distant lands all joy is a yell and a war-dance, all pathos is a howl and a ghastly grin of filed teeth, and that the solution of all problems is found in the barrel of a revolver or on the point of an assegai. And yet it is not so....The picture of life, there as here, is drawn with the same elaboration of detail, colored with the same tints. Only in the cruel serenity of the sky, under the merciless brilliance of the sun, the dazzled eye misses the delicate detail, sees only the strong outlines, while the colours, in the steady light, seem crude and without shadow. Nevertheless, it is the same picture.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>A Personal Record, pp. 98-99.

<sup>2</sup>Megroz, op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>3</sup>Almayer's Folly, Author's Note, p. ix.





He is irritated that his early readers could see no farther than the luxuriant setting, with its harsh perfumes, its turgid, tropical rivers, and its rich, decaying swamps--that they did not realize that here, as well as in London, there are hearts which "must endure the load of the gifts from Heaven: The curse of facts and the blessings of illusions, the bitterness of our wisdom and the deceptive consolation of our folly".<sup>1</sup>

He is still on the defensive in the Author's Note to his second novel, where he says that An Outcast of the Islands brought him the qualification of "exotic writer", a charge which he did not think justified. He admits that it is the most tropical of his eastern tales, and that as he wrote it the mere scenery got a great hold on him; but it his theory that mere luxuriance (some call it outlandishness) of setting is not enough to carry a novel. In the case of this tale, the important element is the imaginative view which the author takes of the characters, especially Willems, of whom Conrad says:

....As to my feeling for Willems it was but the regard one cannot help having for one's own creation. Obviously I could not be indifferent to a man on whose head I had brought so much evil simply by imagining him such as he appears in the novel--and that, too, on a very slight foundation.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. x.

<sup>2</sup>An Outcast of the Islands, Author's Note, p. ix.





In reply to a reviewer who had suggested that the outlandishness of his settings gave Conrad freer play for his fancy, the novelist stated that the knowledge, hints, or themes used in his imaginative works depended directly on the conditions of his active life. Often his contacts, and very slight contacts at that, were the starting points for his stories. Now the places and men which figure in the novels did not loom very romantically in his mind, and he spurns the suggestion that their mere outlandishness liberated his fancy in any great degree.

....Even now when I look back on it with a certain regret (who would not regret his youth?) and positive affection, its coloring wears the sober hue of hard work and exacting calls of duty, things which in themselves are not charged with a feeling of romance.<sup>1</sup>

His theory on this point, as we gather it by implication, is that the author cannot depend upon the externalities of a setting to achieve an effect. He must look for the inner significance, the essential quality and atmosphere, the less obvious meanings in a setting. To be sure, some settings by their very strangeness have an unusually powerful effect upon the reader, but the gifted writer can extract the drama and the emotion from the most prosaic backdrops against which his characters play their parts.

<sup>1</sup>Within the Tides, Author's Note, p. vii.





Conrad had a keen appreciation of what he called "the romantic feeling of reality", and denied that he felt the need of injecting the miraculous or the supernatural into his settings or action. His sensory faculties were extremely acute, and this, combined with a power of examining sympathetically and imaginatively whatever passed before him, gives his settings a unique color and significance. In the most vivid prose he produces a backdrop which is romantic in that it is remote and out of the ordinary experience, and yet realistic in its fidelity to observed phenomena.

He says, however, that his imagination is not so elastic as to provide for the supernatural. If he were to introduce it into his tales "it would fail deplorably and exhibit an unlovely gap".

....But I could never have attempted such a thing, because all my moral and intellectual being is penetrated by an invincible conviction that whatever falls under the dominion of our senses must be in nature and, however exceptional, cannot differ in its essence from all the other effects of the visible and tangible world of which we are a self-conscious part.<sup>1</sup>

He would admit, of course, that even though a writer is faithful to observed reality, the mere fact that he selects certain aspects for inspection and groups them in a particular way gives the whole picture an extra effect, a heightened color. Also, when the writer depends on his memory to supply data, some of the details drop away and only the salient aspects remain.

<sup>1</sup>The Shadow Line, Author's Note, p. vii.





The effect of perspective in memory is to make things loom large because the essentials stand out isolated from their surroundings of insignificant daily facts which have naturally faded out of one's mind.<sup>1</sup>

There is no necessity, he says, for investing the real world with useless supernatural qualities merely for the sake of startling the reader. The world in which we actually live provides enough of the miraculous as it is, and our emotions and intelligence are affected so inexplicably as to "almost justify the conception of life as an enchanted state." Those who trade in the supernatural are dealing with nothing but a manufactured article; it is a fabrication of minds which are insensitive to the mysteries and marvels of the sensible world.<sup>2</sup>

The romantic feeling of reality--an inborn faculty in Conrad--might have become a liability except for the fact that he was disciplined by a sense of personal responsibility, a knowledge of the bitterness of real existence shared by all of mankind. In his point of view even the dark shadows of life should be made to appear with an internal glow. Such romanticism, he says, is not sin. "It is none the worse for the knowledge of truth. It only tries to make the best of it, hard as it may be; and in this hardness discovers a certain aspect of beauty."<sup>3</sup>

The unusual origin of his literary production did not necessarily give a larger scope and impetus to his imagination.

<sup>1</sup>The Shadow Line, Author's Note, p. ix.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. vii-viii.

<sup>3</sup>Within the Tides, Author's Note, p. vii-viii.





He believed that if a creative artist deals with matters outside the humdrum experience of most men, he should more than ever observe a scrupulous fidelity to the validity and truth of his own sensations.

....The problem was to make unfamiliar things credible. To do that I had to create for them, to reproduce for them, to envelop them in their proper atmosphere of actuality. This was the hardest task of all and the most important, in view of that conscientious rendering of truth in thought and fact which has always been my aim.<sup>1</sup>

Conrad is careful to point out that his feeling for romanticism is related to life, not to imaginative literature which, in its early days, was associated with medieval subjects or subjects from a remote past.

....My subjects are not medieval and I have a natural right to them because my path is very much my own. If their course lie out of the beaten path of organized social life, it is, perhaps, because I myself did in a sort break away from it early in obedience to an impulse which must have been very genuine since it has sustained me through all the dangers of disillusion.<sup>2</sup>

Before dealing with Conrad's theories of character drawing in the novel it is illuminating to observe his attitude toward the actual human beings who later, re-synthesized and re-drawn, appeared in his books. From all accounts Conrad had a very deep conviction as to the essential worth and dignity of mankind, and this attitude would naturally influence his theory of character portrayal. That is not to say that he regarded the commonality of men as being very intelligent or

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. viii.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. viii.





even very sensible, but he was never contemptuous of their merits, or cynical about their shortcomings.

This serious attitude seems to have been a matter of training as well as natural inclination. In A Personal Record he says:

An impartial view of humanity in all its degrees of splendour and misery together with a special regard for the rights of the unprivileged of this earth, not on any mystic ground but on the ground of simple fellowship and honorable reciprocity of services, was the dominant characteristic of the mental and moral atmosphere of the houses which sheltered my hazardous childhood:--matters of calm and deep conviction both lasting and consistent, and removed as far as possible from that humanitarianism that seems to be merely a matter of crazy nerves or a morbid conscience.<sup>1</sup>

There is another indication of his attitude in a letter to Edward Garnett, written in August, 1908:

At any rate I think I have always written with dignity....And that not certainly from lack of conviction, which often takes that outward form. The fact is that I have approached things human in a spirit of piety foreign to those lovers of humanity who would like to make of life a sort of Cook's Personally Conducted Tour--from the cradle to the grave. [*Italics mine*] I have never debased that quasi-religious sentiment by tears and groans and sighs. I have neither grinned nor gnashed my teeth. In a word, I have behaved myself decently--which, except in the gross conventional sense, is not so easy as it looks. Therefore there are those who reproach me with the pose of brutality, with the lack of all heart, delicacy, sympathy--sentiment--idealism. There is even one abandoned creature who says I am a neo-platonist. What on earth is that?<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>A Personal Record, p. ix.

<sup>2</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, II, 82-83.





From the testimony of his friends it appears that Conrad was extremely courteous and sympathetic in his relations with his fellowmen. He was sometimes short-tempered, but this was more a matter of high-strung nerves and ill-health than anything basically unfriendly. While his manner toward those he loved might have been excessively emotional on occasions, his view of human nature in the large was contained and honorable. He had a deep conviction that mankind is worthy of help and pity. Yet he was never mawkish. One feels that he understood the simple men about whom he wrote without bestowing on them a regard which was merely sentimental and unrestrained.

In the preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus Conrad says that the art of fiction "must strenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the color of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music--which is the art of arts."<sup>1</sup> One element of plasticity is the relation of characters to setting, a relation which Conrad believes poses a particularly delicate problem for the novelist. The vast, shifting, impersonal Nature which is Conrad's conception of the universe is significant only as a setting and a residence for the spirit of man. It is the artist's problem to appraise fully this atmosphere, to make the environment consonant with the activities of the characters.

<sup>1</sup>p. xiii.





While Conrad professes to believe that the mere action should be a subordinate factor in the novel, the clash of character upon character does give rise to an abundance of colorful action in his stories. In order to prevent this clash from becoming too harsh and dramatic, in order to allow the reader to meditate upon the motives of the characters, Conrad believes it necessary from time to time to slow the action by the imaginative description of setting. His main purpose is the sympathetic delineation of character, but sometimes the duress and strain which the characters undergo is so violent that it must be qualified and toned down. And here the story-teller may well devote himself to an examination of setting, either as a relief from past action or as a preparation for future events.

Conrad gives us a specific instance of the use of this device in a letter to Edward Garnett, in which he talks about the ending to An Outcast of the Islands:

....In the treatment of the last scenes I wanted to convey the kind of placidity that is caused by extreme surprise. You must not forget that they are all immensely amazed. That's why they are so quiet.-- (At least I wanted them to be quiet and only managed to make them colorless.) That's why I put in the quiet morning--the immobility of surrounding matter emphasized only by the flutter of small birds. Then the sense of their position penetrated the hearts--stirs them. They wake up to the reality. Then comes violence: Joanna's slap in Aissa's face, Aissa's shot--and the end just as he sees the joy of sunshine and of life....<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Garnett, Letters From Joseph Conrad, p. 43.





Not only should settings be fashioned as a fitting background for the characters, but the characters should "point up" and give significance to the settings. Conrad tells us, for example, that the real interest for him in the story Typhoon was not so much the storm itself as "the extraordinary complication brought into the ship's life at a moment of exceptional stress by the human element below her decks."<sup>1</sup>

From the first time he heard the anecdote, he found it a worthy subject for meditation. It was marked by irony, debasing weakness, quiet heroism, bloody action. But until the characters arose clearly in his consciousness, he felt that the incident was merely another of the yarns of the sea which he had so often heard.

I felt that to bring out its deeper significance which was quite apparent to me, something other, something more was required; a leading motive that would harmonize all these violent noises, and a point of view that would put all that elemental fury into its proper place.<sup>2</sup>

The typhoon in itself could be nothing but a mere spectacle--even the struggling coolies could be nothing but an insensate mass--unless there was a point of focus, a leading character to bring about a relation between setting and character.

....What was needed of course was Captain MacWhirr. Directly I perceived him I could see that he was the man for the situation. I don't mean to say that I ever saw Captain MacWhirr in the flesh,

<sup>1</sup>Typhoon, Author's Note, p. vii.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. viii.





or had ever come in contact with his literal mind and his dauntless temperament. MacWhirr is not an acquaintance of a few hours, or a few weeks, or a few months. He is the product of twenty years of life. My own life. Conscious invention had little to do with him. If it is true that Captain MacWhirr never walked and breathed on this earth (which I find for my part extremely difficult to believe) I can also assure my readers that he is perfectly authentic. I may venture to assert the same of every aspect of the story, while I confess that the particular typhoon of the tale was not a typhoon of my actual experience.<sup>1</sup>

The stuffy, prosaic, red-whiskered, umbrella-carrying Captain MacWhirr of the steamer Nan-Shan and his first mate, Jukes, are never overborne by the typhoon. The imperturbable and unheroic fortitude of MacWhirr and the more imaginative but no less admirable courage of young Jukes, the devotion of the engineer, Rout--"good man, Rout"--the moral collapse of the second mate--all these aspects of human nature give point to the tale. And this relation of character to setting and events was the result of a deliberately conceived theory of the author.

Imagination, not invention, is the supreme master of art as of life.<sup>2</sup>

In this short sentence is the key to Conrad's theory of character-drawing. He depended upon "the imaginative treatment of reality" as far as his creation of characters is concerned, no less than when engaged in plotting the events in his novels. Nearly all of his characters are rooted in the unique experiences he had as a wanderer around the world--they are people he met in the Malay Peninsula, in Africa, in

<sup>1</sup>Typhoon, Author's Note, p. viii.

<sup>2</sup>A Personal Record, p. 25.





Paris, and in London. His curious and searching mind played over them, until he knew them well enough to turn them into literary capital. It was not enough to understand the surface; he must know the inner man and judge of the secret forces that moved him.

Of Lord Jim, for example, Conrad says:

My Jim is not a type of wide commonness. But I can safely assure my readers that he is not the product of coldly perverted thinking. He's not a figure of Northern Mists either. One sunny morning in the commonplace surroundings of an Eastern roadstead, I saw his form pass by--appealing--significant--under a cloud--perfectly silent. Which is as it should be. It was for me, with all the sympathy of which I was capable, to seek fit words for his meaning. He was "one of us."<sup>1</sup>

Lord Jim was indeed "one of us". He is prey to doubts which strike all of us, unless we are extraordinarily stupid or extraordinarily lucky. In his own way he marched to his own little triumph, and the story, despite its bizarre setting, is believable enough. It is believable because Conrad knew his Jim, and succeeded in describing him with a very discerning sympathy.

He speaks very familiarly and whimsically to the shade of Almayer, whom he expects to meet in the next world:

I would say, after listening courteously to the unvibrating tone of his measured remonstrances, which should not disturb, of course, the solemn eternity of stillness in the least--I would say something like this: "It is true, Almayer, that in the world below I have converted your name to my own uses. But that is a very small larceny. What's in a name, O Shade?....You came to me stripped of all prestige

<sup>1</sup>Lord Jim, Author's Note, p. ix.





by men's queer smiles and the disrespectful chatter of every vagrant trader in the Islands. Your name was the common property of the winds; it, as it were, floated naked over the waters about the Equator. I wrapped around its unhonoured form the royal mantle of the tropics and have essayed to put into the hollow sound the very anguish of paternity--feats which you did not demand from me--but remember that all the toil and all the pain were mine. In your earthly life you haunted me, Almayer."<sup>1</sup>

Conrad was so impressed by this man's character--a character which he had actually observed--that he was almost forced to perpetuate it in two of his books.

Conrad believed it necessary to live intensely with his characters, spending long and harassed hours in analyzing their motives and judging the truth about their reactions. In a letter to Edward Noble, for example, he says:

It took me 3 years to finish the Folly. There was not a day I did not think of it referring to chapters 8 to 12, written from February, 1891, to May 22, 1894. Not a day. And after all I consider it honestly a miserable failure. Every critic but two or three overrated the book. It took me a year to tear the Outcast out of myself and upon my word of honour,--I look on it (now it's finished) with bitter disappointment.<sup>2</sup>

Edward Garnett testifies on this point:

Conrad, exhilarated by my praise, then described his idea of the downward path of Willems and foreshadowed Aissa's part in the drama. The plot had already taken shape in Conrad's mind, but most of the action was still in a state of flux. Conrad's attitude toward this novel was from the first a strange blend of creative ardor and skepticism. He spoke deprecatingly of his knowledge of Malay life, but all the same the figures of Willems, Joanna, and Aissa captivated his imagination. His sardonic interest in Willems' disintegration reflected, I believe, his own disillusionment over the Congo.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>A Personal Record, p. 88. (Conrad's account of his meeting with the real Almayer appears on pp. 74-86.)

<sup>2</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, I, 183.

<sup>3</sup>"Joseph Conrad", Century Magazine, 130: 45-56, Feb. 1928.





In other words, the novelist was continually excited about his characters, drew mental pictures of their actions, and consulted his friends eagerly about them. Rarely are Conrad's men and women drawn falsely. Occasionally they do become literary attenuations, like Mrs. Travers in The Rescue and the husband in the story The Return, but generally they are warmly and solidly constructed out of the flesh that Conrad really knew. Their passions are not fantastic, nor their actions unnatural if one allows for the exoticism of his locale. As he says in this connection:

I have always suspected in the effort to bring into play the extremities of emotions the debasing touch of insincerity....<sup>1</sup>

One sees vivid traces of his wrestling with character portrayal in one of his letters to Edward Garnett. Here he is disappointed because he has missed his purpose in one of the chapters of An Outcast of the Islands. He has obscured his conception and resolves--without faith--to rewrite the chapter:

....I am glad you like the xxiii chapter. To tell you the honest truth I like it myself. As to the xxiv I feel convinced that the right course would be to destroy it, to scatter its ashes to the four winds of heaven. The only question is: can I?

I am afraid I can't! I lack the courage to set before myself the task of rewriting the thing. It is not--as you say--a matter of correction here and there--a matter of changed words or lines--or pages. The whole conception seems to me wrong. I seem to have

<sup>1</sup>A Personal Record, p. xx.





seen the wrong side of the situation. I was always afraid of it.--For months I have been afraid of that chapter--and now it is written--and the foreboding is realized in a dismal failure.

Nothing now can unmake my mistake. I shall try--but I shall try without faith, because all my work is produced unconsciously (so to speak) and I cannot to any purpose with what is in myself.--I am sure you will understand what I mean.--It isn't in me to improve what has got itself written....<sup>1</sup>

The letter is a long one, and goes minutely into his conception of the characters. Enough has been quoted to show the confused, almost desperate, state into which he worked himself in pursuance of his determination that the truth should be told about his characters, that his confessed inability to invent them should be compensated for by his insight into their real motives.

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, I, 182-83. Jean-Aubry points out that the pagination was altered before the book was completed, so it is now impossible to locate the passages to which Conrad was alluding.





## Chapter VI

GLIMPSES OF PASSAGES IN CONRAD WHICH SEEM TO ILLUSTRATE HIS  
THEORY OF TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL

Light may be thrown upon Conrad's critical theory not only by quoting his own words on the subject, but also by glimpsing some of the passages in his works that seem to illustrate his theory. The pages immediately following will serve the purpose of directing the reader to specific passages in Conrad's novels which relate to his ideas of technique. Some evaluation of these illustrations will be included.

There is no pretension in this chapter to a thorough, detailed, and systematic analysis and ordering of Conrad's technical devices as practiced by him on the basis of his theories. This chapter is a suggestive one rather than an ordered and exhaustive attempt to show how Conrad translates the theory of the technique of the novel into practice. It is to be hoped that the more detailed study implied in this chapter may be accomplished some day either by the author of this dissertation or by some one else.

As has been pointed out, Conrad placed little value on the ability to invent plots; he insisted "not on the events but on their effect on the persons in the tale". He advises Edward Noble not to throw himself away on fables, on outward events, which are merely illustrative of inward feelings (this was in relation to a certain death that Noble was describing.)





He follows his own advice in the case of the Nigger of the ship Narcissus. It was sufficiently pathetic, but strictly subordinated to the feelings of the tense crew whose imaginations had been captured by that woeful figure. His death was a symbol of resurrection. As soon as the wind arose, the crew lived. A wind sprang up out of the sea after the Nigger died; the ship was sent scudding northward and the ordinary business of living sailors was resumed. Nostromo's death, too, coming as it did at the end of the book and therefore at a point of great emphasis, is not so spectacular as to blot out the picture of the living Linda, bitterly crying her loss from the lonely lighthouse.

Of all of Conrad's novels, the one least founded on actual fact, the one most dependent on invention, is probably The Secret Agent. In reference to this book he writes to Marguerite Poradowska in 1912:

Your good opinion of The Secret Agent overjoys me. The book is not very characteristic of me, but I am fond of it because I think that in it I managed to treat what is after all a melodramatic subject by the method of irony. This was the artistic aim I set myself, for you well know that anarchy and anarchists are outside my experience; I know almost nothing of the philosophy, and nothing at all of the men. I created this out of whole cloth....<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to note that this novel is one of the least successful, the least credible, of his entire output. But Conrad's strange lack of inventive power was usually compensated for by an extraordinary sharpness of observation of

<sup>1</sup>Letters of Joseph Conrad to Marguerite Poradowska, p. 116.





those aspects of reality which were before him and which his senses could comprehend. He was sensitive to places and to men, he had a shrewd insight into motives.

The looseness of plot structure which we see in Conrad's novels was not a result of slovenliness, but of careful calculation. A good example is Lord Jim, a novel which Arthur Symons calls "a model of intelligent disarray".<sup>1</sup> Here we have a series of slight events which are used as a thread to bind together a most illuminating analysis of a human being. The story is told by indirection, interpolation, and reversals in time sequence. In spite of the seemingly haphazard development, however, the tale is finally revealed as an organic whole.

Perhaps because the canvas was larger, the method is not so successful in Nostromo. This novel is in many ways very typical of Latin-American politics and life, it has stirring passages, and Nostromo himself emerges as a full-fleshed figure. The theme of the overwhelming and sinister influence of a great silver mine is consistently maintained. But there is not, as R. L. Megroz would have us believe, a masterly synthesis of events and localities on a tremendous canvas. The organization of the story creaks, the angle of narration shifts too abruptly, and the letter-device, a favorite with Conrad, has an improbable effect here.

<sup>1</sup>"Joseph Conrad", Forum Magazine, 53: 579-92, May, 1915.





The determination of the angle of narration cost Conrad much heartbreaking labor, as is apparent from many of his letters. The Rescue, which took him many years to finish, was a particularly difficult story to tell, and here again the looseness of the plot disconcerts many readers. No such problem arose with The Secret Agent; Conrad "began this book impulsively and wrote it continuously". He had just finished writing Nostromo and The Mirror of the Sea, and suddenly the tale of The Secret Agent came to him in the shape of a few words spoken by a friend in a casual discussion about anarchist activities. The inspiration was strengthened by his reading of the recollections of an English police official. Then against the London background the character of Winnie Verloc appeared dramatically. Other characters emerged from memory, and the story was on its way "to its anarchistic end of utter desolation, madness, and despair". In this case the angle of narration was settled without the tribulation involved in The Rescue.

Conrad's most famous character is Marlow, and with this loquacious seaman we have a device for presenting the story without placing the responsibility on the author himself. As Crankshaw says, Conrad desired "that another should hold the lantern up to his characters, though the light was in his own hand".<sup>1</sup> He felt that the direct method of presentation is weakened at times because the reader is likely to

<sup>1</sup>Crankshaw, op. cit., p. 31.





turn his attention from the story to the author; therefore, the job of telling the story must be turned over to another. This other, in the case of Marlow, is a direct participant in the action, and, since he tells the story at first hand, he has greater authority over the reader. Marlow is not always a successful device for carrying the narrative, attractive as he is as a personality. His long digressions, his extraordinary ability as a psychologist, and his eloquence, are characteristics which the reader is reluctant to believe could be found in a mariner.

But Marlow<sup>1</sup> was only one of Conrad's instruments for giving an objective clarity to a highly subjective material. In Nostromo we see another angle of narration--that of an observer who relates the story with such a wealth of detail and comment that the reader is enabled to get the inner significance of the clash of character upon character and of environment upon character. In Under Western Eyes we have "something in the nature of a journal, a diary, yet not exactly that in its actual form".<sup>2</sup> Freya of the Seven Isles is told partly by means of letters. The Secret Sharer is a story within a story. The Arrow of Gold is enclosed within a rather improbable diary.

<sup>1</sup>Henry James, in "The New Novel--1914", says that Conrad's Marlow device is the most difficult and burdensome that he could have used.

<sup>2</sup>Under Western Eyes, p. 4.





To the ordinary reader of Conrad's "Far East" novels, the settings are intensely vivid and have the appearance of authenticity.<sup>1</sup> Although he did not have an expert's knowledge of the Malay Archipelago, he has given an imperishable picture of that enchanting and softly cruel place. When we read of Hudig's lofty and cool warehouses, of the muddy beach before Almayer's house, of the fecund and obscene jungle in which Willems lost his soul, and of the burning ocean over which Lord Jim and his pilgrims passed, we can have confidence in the essential authenticity of those scenes even though they are outside our ordinary experience. They are at least based on actuality and on a certain amount of real experience. If they are romantic, it is because Conrad saw the romantic nature of even the most drab situations in which human character played a part.

To say that Conrad makes no use of the supernatural in setting or in action is not to say that his novels lack a sense of mystery, or foreboding, or an atmosphere of sinister gloom. Sometimes they do have these qualities--but only because they are found in Nature. If there is a flavor of the supernatural in, for example, The Shadow Line, it is in the minds

<sup>1</sup>A dissenting voice, however, is heard in an article by Sir Hugh Clifford, a friend of Conrad who had spent some time in that part of the world: he is quoted by Mrs. Conrad in her Joseph Conrad and His Circle, p. 76, as saying...."I have a saddening feeling that I am missing much that is accessible to other readers of this book [Almayer's Folly]; that the expert knowledge of the men and women of a little-known race, with which the circumstances of my life have chanced to endow me, and to which, be it said, Conrad was the last ever to pretend, mars for me the enjoyment that, lacking that knowledge, would have been mine."





of the characters and not in the intention of the author himself. In this story it is Mr. Burns who sees ghosts, not Conrad.

....As to the effect of a mental or moral shock on a common mind, it is quite a legitimate subject for study and description. Mr. Burns' moral being receives a severe shock in his relations with his late captain, and this in his diseased state turns into a mere superstitious fancy compounded of fear and animosity. This fact is one of the elements of the story, but there is nothing supernatural in it, nothing so to speak from beyond the confines of this world, which in all conscience holds enough mystery and terror in itself.<sup>1</sup>

The story, somewhat autobiographical in character, deals with a young captain who had arrived at Bangkok to assume his first command--a sailing ship whose previous captain had died under odd circumstances. He was met on board by the chief mate, Mr. Burns:

....His long, red moustache determined the character of his physiognomy, which struck me as pugnacious in (strange to say) a ghastly sort of way....There was something reluctant and at the same time attentive in his bearing....We left the cabin and went round the ship together. His face in the full light of day appeared very worn, meagre, even haggard....<sup>2</sup>

Despite the handicaps of a crew sick with fever and an almost imperceptible wind, the captain got his ship out into the deadly waters of the Gulf of Siam, bound for the Indian Ocean. They drifted south to the entrance of the Gulf, where, in latitude 8-20, the body of the previous captain had been

<sup>1</sup>The Shadow Line, Author's Note, p. viii.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., III, passim.





committed to the waves. He had been a brutal madman, and his spirit seemed to lie heavily on the crew, and especially on Mr. Burns. The wind died away entirely, more of the crew became ill, and it was found that the medicine cabinet was insufficiently stocked with quinine. As the situation became worse, the captain realized that Mr. Burns, weakened by illness, was going mad, obsessed with the idea that until they crossed latitude 8-20 the evil influence of the previous captain would linger over the ship. At last the still, hot weather was dissipated by a terrific tropical storm, the wind picked up, and the stricken ship raced for a port for medical assistance. All of the crew, including that fine character Ransome, the ship's ~~crew~~<sup>cook</sup>, were saved. The young captain, greatly sobered by the adventure, had crossed "the shadow-line" between youth and maturity.

The whole story is a recognition that the natural world holds a great deal of mystery and terror--a terror that can be explained by natural causes. Even the most weird events, such as Mr. Burns' sudden emergence upon the dark poop deck<sup>1</sup> can be adequately explained. The fantastic horror of the incident was enhanced by the grimness of the situation, and the perfectly understandable tenseness of the captain's nerves.

Conrad's contempt for the vain imaginings which delude people into a belief in the supernatural appears here and there in his letters as he ridicules spiritualism, and in one of his essays he pokes fun at a certain book dealing with Immortality.





To find out its value you must go to the book. But I will observe here that an Immortality liable at any moment to betray itself fatuously by the forcible incantations of Mr. Stead or Professor Crookes is scarcely worth having. Can you imagine anything more squalid than an Immortality at the beck and call of Eusapia Palladino? That woman lives on the top of a Neapolitan house, and gets our poor, pitiful, august dead, flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone, spirit of our spirit, who have loved, suffered, and died, as we must love, suffer, and die--she gets them to beat tambourines in a corner and protrude shadowy limbs through a curtain. This is particularly horrible, because, if one had to put one's faith in these things one could not even die safely from disgust, as one would long to do.<sup>1</sup>

Conrad's settings are not so "dynamic" as those in Hardy's novels--in the sense that they often control or motivate the actions of the people--but they do form an excellent underlying theme-note. We have spoken of the use of setting for the purpose of slowing the action. Instances of the deliberate use of this device to allow the reader to assimilate and ponder upon the preceding action are numerous in Conrad's novels: the description of the quiet atmosphere on the deck of the Narcissus after Captain Allistoun browbeats his rebellious crew and forces Donkin to replace the belaying pin in its socket; the pages of description after the high point of suspense when the scheming engineer of the Sofala learns that his captain is going blind<sup>2</sup>; the meditative and retrogressive pages immediately following the conspiracy of Mr. Jones and Ricardo to invade Heyst's island haven.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"The Life Beyond", in Notes on Life and Letters, pp. 68-69.

<sup>2</sup>The End of the Tether.

<sup>3</sup>Victory.





An example of the use of a "pivotal" character to give point and significance to setting is James Wait in The Nigger of the Narcissus. The theme of this tale is the courage and "solidarity" of men in the face of danger and despair. Desperately they battle the fury of the elements, a band of simple men in an unemotional brotherhood. In their midst is the pathetic figure of James Wait, a negro sailor dying of consumption. His insistent demand for sympathy, the drama of his powerful personality, his effect on every member of the ship's company including the captain--all of this is constantly kept before the reader. Despite the grandeur of the storm scenes and the absorbing glimpses of ship life, it is the lonely figure dying in his cabin that binds the story together and gives it significance. Yet the character of Wait is woven into the action, rather than forced upon it, and the pathos of his story comes indirectly and suggestively. In this last connection, it was Conrad's belief that mere explicitness and literalness takes the attention away from things that really matter, that explicitness "is fatal to the glamour of all artistic work", since it destroys suggestiveness.

Although his characters are not invented, but taken from the life which he knew, Conrad does not give them the same sort of verisimilitude which we see, for example, in Jane Austen's novels. He does not attempt to photograph them--a method which, while it produces admirable and familiar





effects, is still almost entirely a two-dimensional art.

Conrad is always more interested in those impulses which are deep-lying and obscure. As William Lyons Phelps says:

Conrad's people are made in the fusion of memory and thought. They are not given to the reader until the novelist has thought about them intensely. He sees them clearly but loves to speculate about them.<sup>1</sup>

Conrad admits that most of his characters come from real life, and this implies a lack of originality--but his power of analyzing these characters is an amazing one. Crankshaw puts this in another way when he says: "He was an analytical psychologist of a most distinguished order, but not a creative psychologist at all. But that is very far from saying that he was not a creative artist."<sup>2</sup>

It will be noticed that many of Conrad's heroes are men with a fixed idea, a prepossession which gives the keynote to their characters. Often they are tortured souls, struggling to hold on to a life without purpose. The novelist tries to analyze this fixed idea, to examine the motives behind the action. He aims to portray the complete mind of Lord Jim, Almayer, Heyst, Razumov, Decoud, Captain Whalley, Blunt, and the other fascinating men of his stories. In this attempt he does not use the jargon or mechanism of the psychology current in his day. As Wilbur Cross says, he does not profess to discover "complexes" in Falk, Lord Jim, and Flora de Barral, nor does he "distinguish sharply between the conscious and the unconscious

<sup>1</sup>"Advance of the English Novel", Bookman Magazine, 43: 297-304, May, 1916.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Conrad, iv.





activities of the mind, though he recognized both aspects of human behavior."<sup>1</sup> After an extremely sharp observation of external behavior he makes deductions as to the inner unrest that produced it.

The comment is occasionally made that Conrad's portrayal of women characters is inferior to his pictures of men, that his women are a passive factor in male life in his pages, that the savage women have as little complexity as a thunder-storm and the cultivated ones are self-conscious or mechanical. One of the clearest expressions of this point of view is contained in an article by Grace Isabel Colbron. She makes this observation:

The women are there, of course; but they are always the passive factor, never the active or positive force. It is not their development, their psychology, which matters in Joseph Conrad's books. They are there just as one more, possibly often the most potent, force of nature, acting on and influencing the development of the male protagonist--never because of themselves or of what may happen to them. Hence Conrad's women are never complex. They do not change or develop in any sense of the word. They are presented to us complete, in one tone, like the line of the horizon, or the color of a flower. They stand out in one definite note of colour, either dull, drab, or flaming scarlet, as a fixed feature of the landscape. What they do, or what they are....it is usually what they are....does not matter of itself. It counts only in its effect on the men into whose lives they come....And herein lies perhaps his preference for....and his greater measure of success in.... depicting the savage or half-savage woman, or the woman whom natural surroundings have forced, or allowed to be merely the primitive expression of a natural law....The others, the well-to-do woman of position, so beloved as heroine by many writers, do not seem to interest Mr. Conrad at all.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Four Contemporary Novelists, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup>"Joseph Conrad's Women", Bookman Magazine, Jan. 1914.





There is considerable justice in Miss Colbron's remarks--Conrad's world is a man's world, and the reader of Conrad thinks of Lord Jim, the Nigger, Almayer, and Razumov before he thinks of Mrs. Gould, Natalie Haldin, or Flora de Barrel. His savage women are not mute, however, and his civilized ones are not mechanical. If they seem to be passive or inarticulate it is only because Conrad's sense of reserve made it impossible for him to describe adequately the ultra-sensitive, sentimental, and hysterical types. He tried to picture a neurotic type in The Return--and the result was a rather wooden little story which he himself admitted was a failure.

As he says in A Personal Record, one can be a historian of hearts without being a historian of emotions. Human affairs are worthy of the admiration and pity of the artist, but they are also worthy of respect. This means that the artist cannot be maudlin or excessively sentimental. And so the women of his books are handled with restraint. They are women who, "however much or well they speak, give the effect of inarticulacy because they keep so much behind for the intuition to catch or miss according to its desert."<sup>1</sup> Conrad says: "Even before the most seductive reveries I have remained mindful of that sobriety of interior life....in which alone the naked form of truth....can be rendered without shame."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Wilson Follet, Joseph Conrad: A Short Study, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup>A Personal Record, p. 111.





As to Conrad's word-sense and fortunate choice of English as a medium of creative expression, George W. Whiting, who made a comparison of six of Conrad's short stories as they appeared in serial form with their final appearance in book text, has this to say:

The alterations are proof of Conrad's remarkable word-sense. The fact that few changes were required proves Conrad's concern that his serial text should be reasonably perfect. The improvement in idiom in many alterations is significant. And lastly, comparison of the book-text with the serial-text fortifies Conrad's claim that English was his natural medium of expression.<sup>1</sup>

His vocabulary is a very rich one, and his varied sentences so heavily freighted with images that, although they maintain their rhythm, they sometimes become obscure in meaning. "So glowing, luxuriant and habitual is this delight in words that it reveals through its very development, a conscious apprenticeship of language, a possession clear and actual in all its parts."<sup>2</sup> When we remember the struggle he made to acquire this new language, we cannot but admire the final victory he made over it.

Conrad's style was very carefully calculated, his constant purpose being to make it interesting by the quality of surprise. He avoided what was obvious and trite, as his letter to Clifford indicates, and an examination of many of his sentences will reveal them as a series of little jabs at the inattention of the usual reader. They are heavily freighted

<sup>1</sup>"Conrad's Revision of Six of His Short Stories", PMLA, XLVIII, pp. 552-57.

<sup>2</sup>Legouis and Cazamian, A History of English Literature (revised edition, 1933) p. 1371.





with images, and certainly they lack what Empson calls "an asceticism tending to kill language by stripping words of all associations."<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, some of Conrad's passages are so rich and luxuriant that he might be accused of falling into a "hedonism tending to kill language by dissipating their sense under a multiplicity of associations."<sup>2</sup> That is, he may so overburden the objective scene which he describes with his subjective vision that the result is merely the expression of a mood--not the portrayal of actuality at all. Crankshaw, for instance, believes that his description of the Patna as it hissed along the tropic sea is just such a purple passage. "There the word as an instrument of precision," he says, "is abandoned completely for the word as a unit of rhetoric."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Empson, op. cit., p. 296.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Conrad, p. 238.





## Chapter VII

## CONRAD'S THEORY AND PRACTICE OF THE DRAMA

Although most of Conrad's technical criticism has to do with the novel, he makes a number of interesting observations about the art of writing plays. Strangely enough, for a man who had such a clear sense of the dramatic possibilities in a novel, he could not visualize action on the stage. Like most artists he had a tantalizing desire to step out of his province and try his hand in a sister art. He wrote several plays, none of which was a success. The best, if somewhat facetious, expression of his bafflement in matters theatrical appears in a letter which he wrote to R. B. Cunninghame-Graham as early as December, 1897:

I have no notion of a play. No play grips me on the stage or off. Each of them seems to me an amazing freak of folly. They are all unbelievable and as disillusioning as a bang on the head. I greatly desire to write a play myself. It is my dark and secret ambition. And yet I can't conceive how a sane man can sit down deliberately to write a play and not go mad before he has done. The actors appear to me like a lot of wrong-headed lunatics pretending to be sane. Their malice is stitched with white threads. They are disguised and ugly. To look at them breeds in my melancholy soul thoughts of murder and suicide,--such is my anger and my loathing of their transparent pretences. There is a taint of subtle corruption in their blank voices, in their blinking eyes, in the grimacing faces, in the false light, in the false passion, in the words that have been learned by heart. But I love a marionette show....<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Aubry--Joseph Conrad, I, 213.





It is evidently not so much the plays themselves, but the acting which repels him. A marionette show, since it does not depend upon human actors and consists only in the grotesque angularity of mechanical puppets, is not in the border-area between art and reality which he thinks is inhabited by real actors--and therefore it does not distress him.

In March, 1908, he comments on a play by Galsworthy in a letter to Edward Garnett, and adds:

I have a morbid horror of the theater. It grows. It has prevented me from seeing Jack's Joy. I simply could not make up my mind to enter the place of abominations. It is not the horror of plays: it is the horror of acting.<sup>1</sup>

That his opinion did not change in the course of the years is evidenced by another letter to Garnett in 1920:

I prefer Cinema to Stage. The Movie is just a silly stunt for silly people--but the theatre is more compromising since it is capable of falsifying the very soul of one's work both on the imaginative and on the intellectual side--besides having some sort of inferior poetics of its own which is bound to play havoc with that imponderable quality of creative literary expression which depends on one's own individuality.<sup>2</sup>

Conrad tried his hand at writing a play about 1905, when he produced a one-actor in four scenes called One Day More. The play met with no great success on the boards. Despite Galsworthy's over-indulgent introduction to the printed version,<sup>3</sup> it is no better than the run-of-the-mill stuff that one meets in college drama classes. The exposition is stilted and the

<sup>1</sup>Garnett, Letters From Joseph Conrad, p. 120.

<sup>2</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, I, 114.

<sup>3</sup>The printed version was published by John Castle, London, in 1924.





dialogue clumsy. The plot deals with Bessie, the daughter of an irate old man whose naturally bad temper has been exacerbated by blindness. Bessie befriends old Captain Hagberd, a slightly addle-pated neighbor who has been advertising for years for information about a runaway son. Harry, the son, turns up like a bad penny, but Hagberd, now quite crazy, does not recognize him. Bessie is attracted to the reckless Harry but realizes that he can be happy only if allowed to continue his vagabond life. Instead of persuading him to stay, she resolves to take care of Hagberd herself, and gives Harry a half-guinea to return to London to his cronies. He kisses her abruptly and departs, evidently content to leave his infirm father to her care.

Laughing Anne is a one-actor adapted from Conrad's short story Because of the Dollars. Except for a character designated as A Man Without Hands and certain twilight scenes which demand too much of the stage, this play is actable and fairly exciting. In a tropical setting, the story concerns a group of plotters led by a man without hands. They determine to rob a trader named Davidson of the dollars which he is freighting on his ship. The mistress of one of the plotters, a woman named Laughing Anne who had been befriended by Davidson somewhere in her lurid past, tells him of his danger. He repels the boarding party, but Anne is killed by the man without hands. Davidson rescues her child, and saves his dollars.





The Secret Agent is a dramatization of Conrad's novel of the same title. It is a four-acter, and the writing of it cost him considerable heart-burning. He writes:

I do not enjoy writing plays. It is an exercise in ingenuity. I found the writing of The Secret Agent very trying; it meant cutting all the flesh off the book. And I realized then, as I had never done, what a gruesome story I had written. In writing the novel I had veiled the plot to some extent by all those elements which go to make a book. I had to get at the bare bones of the story in making my play.<sup>1</sup>

Just before it appeared on the boards, Conrad wrote to John Galsworthy (June, 1921):

I admit that I wrote the play to be acted but at the same time I will tell you frankly that I look with no pleasurable anticipation to seeing it on the stage. The mere thought of what a perfectly well-meaning actor may make in the way of conventionalized villain of my Professor, which I assure you is quite a serious attempt to illustrate a mental and emotional state which had its weight in the affairs of this world, gives me a little shudder.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of his harsh opinion of acting, and notwithstanding the fact that the play was a failure, Conrad had the grace to say, in another letter dated November 3, 1922:

Now it is all over, my state may be described as that of serene joy, only marred at the injustice of my past thoughts towards the actors, who had a lot of characters, certainly not of a "stock" kind, thrown at their heads just 20 days before the first performance. Now like a man touched by grace, I think of them with actual tenderness and almost with affection.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>R. L. Megroz, A Talk With Joseph Conrad, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, II, 258.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 282.





Though he met difficulties in writing plays, Conrad was by no means deficient in critical acumen about other men's plays. For example, in a long letter to Garnett he gives an excellent analysis of Garnett's play The Breaking Point, published by Duckworth & Co. in 1907.<sup>1</sup> He admits: "But one cannot dislike an art so much without understanding something of it in only a prejudiced sort of way."<sup>2</sup> To sum it up, one can say that his critical dislikes in the world of the theater are temperamental rather than rational.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Garnett, Letters From Joseph Conrad, p. 195.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>3</sup>Another example of temperamental criticism is his attitude toward verse. His own prose had many poetic qualities, but poetry had no particular appeal to him. He was temperamentally unable to write it, nor had he any great critical appreciation of it. He writes to Garnett:

Thanks ever so much for the books which I fear will be wasted upon me. You know how rebellious I am to verse. It's like a curse laid on me. (op. cit., p. 85.)

In another letter he ventures this remark:

And by the bye, R. Bridges is a poet. I'm damned if he ain't! There's more poesy in one page of "Shorter Poems" than in the whole volume of Tennyson. This is my deliberate opinion. And what a descriptive power! The man hath wings--sees from on high. It is the real thing--a direct appeal to mankind, not a certain kind of man. It is natural beauty--not would-be beautiful notions. (op. cit., p. 118.)





## Chapter VIII

## CONRAD'S STYLE AND "WORD-SENSE"

In the body of Conrad's critical remarks concerning style one sees his constant preoccupation with the manner in which a novel is written. Naturally the element of style would loom large in the mind of a man who could write fluently in French and in Polish as well as in English. His English style was to some degree conditioned by his earlier training in other languages.<sup>1</sup> The richness and virtuosity of his style could have been achieved only after a long and deliberate attention to the potentialities of his adopted tongue. In addition to this carefully cultivated observation of words and their subtle gradations of meaning, he had an instinctive pictorial sense and a natural rhythmic sense.

It is well known that Conrad began to amass his store of English words by reading from Shakespeare and the Bible. While it is not always clear what one means by saying that a writer shows traces of "a Biblical style"--mere oddness of metaphors often produces this designation--it is probably true that an ingenious critic could point out Biblical influences on Conrad's style. One of his earliest critics says

<sup>1</sup>The present writer lacks a knowledge of Polish and therefore cannot analyze accurately the effect of Polish on Conrad's English idiom. See, however, the article by A. P. Coleman Polonisms in the English of Conrad's Chance, in PMLA XLVI, pp. 463-68. Also see Gustav Morf's analysis of the effect of Polish idioms and figures of speech on Conrad's style in his The Polish Heritage of Joseph Conrad, IX.





that:

His vigorous, primal use of words, his racial idioms and ancient rich metaphors warrant the idea that he came to us along the old broad highway of English speech and thought, the King James version.<sup>1</sup>

Since he believes that all art appeals primarily to the senses, Conrad insists that a delicate word-sense is a most necessary part of the novelist's equipment.

....it is only through an unremitting never-discouraged care for the shape and ring of sentences that an approach can be made to plasticity, to colour, and that the light of magic suggestiveness may be brought to play for an evanescent instant over the commonplace surface of words: of the old, old words, worn thin, defaced by ages of careless usage.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the difficulty of learning to write in his adopted tongue, Conrad entertained the theory that English was his natural medium of expression, that the cadence, meaning, and subtlety of the language gave him instruments which for his purpose could not be excelled.

The truth of the matter is that my faculty to write in English is as natural as any other aptitude with which I might have been born. I have a strange and overpowering feeling that it had always been an inherent part of myself....and as to adoption--well, yes, there was adoption; but it was I who was adopted by the genius of the language, which directly I came out of the stammering stage made me its own so completely that its very idioms I truly believe had a direct action on my temperament and fashioned my still plastic character....<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>J. A. Macy, "The Writings of Joseph Conrad", Atlantic Monthly, 98: 697-702, Nov., 1906.

<sup>2</sup>The Nigger of the Narcissus, preface, p. xiii.

<sup>3</sup>A Personal Record, p. viii.





This theory gives language a tremendous potency in the moulding of a man's nature, and Conrad is quick to say that the effect of English on him was "a very intimate action and for that reason it is too mysterious to explain". One might as well try to explain love at first sight.

....There was something in this conjunction of exulting, almost physical recognition, the same sort of emotional surrender and the same pride of possession, all united in the wonder of a great discovery; but there was on it none of that shadow of dreadful doubt that falls on the very flame of our perishable passions. One knew very well that this was forever....<sup>1</sup>

He felt that English vocabulary and structure is more flexible than French, that his word-sense could be more hospitable to the Anglo-Saxon. In a letter to Hugh Walpole dated June 7, 1918, he thanks that writer for a critical study which Walpole had made of his work, and remarks on this problem of French versus English. It is quite evident that he was firmly convinced of the superiority of English.

My dear Walpole,

I want to thank you at once for the little book and to tell you that I am profoundly touched by many things you have found it possible in your heart and conscience to say about my work. The only thing that grieves me and makes me dance with rage is the cropping up of the legend set afloat by Hugh Clifford about my hesitation between English and French as a writing language. For it is absurd. When I wrote the first words of Almayer's Folly I had been already for years and years thinking in English. I began to think

<sup>1</sup>A Personal Record, p. viii.





in English long before I mastered, I won't say the style (I haven't done that yet), but the mere uttered speech. Is it thinkable that anybody possessed of some effective inspiration should contemplate for a moment such a frantic thing as translating it into another tongue? And there are also other considerations: such as the sheer appeal of the language, my quickly awakened love for its prose cadences, a subtle and unforeseen accord of my emotional nature with its genius....You may take it from me that if I had not known English I wouldn't have written a line for print, in my life. Clifford and I were discussing the nature of the two languages and what I said was: that if I had been offered the alternative I would have been afraid to grapple with French, which is crystallized in the form of its sentence and therefore more exacting and less appealing. But there was never any alternative offered or even dreamed of....<sup>1</sup>

For an exacting craftsman like Conrad the problem of style--its nuances, subtle implications, and difficult choices--was a very harassing one. In A Personal Record he says:

....And in this matter of life and art it is not the Why that matters so much to our happiness as the How. As the Frenchman said, "Il y a toujours la manière." Very true. Yes. There is the manner. The manner in laughter, in tears, in irony, in indignations and enthusiasms, in judgments--and even in love. The manner in which, as in the features and character of a human face, the inner truth is foreshadowed for those who know how to look at their kind.<sup>2</sup>

The necessity of style, the compulsion to pay the most rigorous attention to the manner of the telling, often cost him agonies of creative toil. In a letter to Edward Garnett, he wails:

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, II, 206.

<sup>2</sup>A Personal Record, p. xxi.





I seem to have lost all sense of style and yet I am haunted, mercilessly haunted, by the necessity of style. And that story I can't write weaves itself into all I see, into all I speak, into all I think, into the lines of every book I try to read. I haven't read for days. You know how bad it is when one feels one's lungs, or liver. Well, I feel my brain. I am distinctly conscious of the contents of my head. My story is there in a fluid--in an evading shape. I can't get hold of it, any more than you can grasp a handful of water.<sup>1</sup>

Another indication of his conscientious attitude is seen in a conversation with R. L. Megroz, in which he is reported as saying:

.....But in making the collected editions of my works I found I did not have to change a single thing. I corrected one or two faults of grammar, of which there is always a certain quantity in my work--not faults that a foreigner would make, but faults that a very careless man using English as a native language would make. I am always worrying about the right phrase and saying, "This will never do!" of something I have written. A man might be disdainfully careless, but as a matter of course a man must surely write the best he can. It is inconceivable that a man should compose less well than he is able to compose. It is like a man walking lame when he is perfectly well.<sup>2</sup>

Part of the problem of "writing as well as one can" is to understand the flexibility and many-sidedness of words, their denotations and connotations, the emotional impacts which they make. Conrad had a good appreciation of the richness of ambiguity, in the Empson sense of "any consequence of language, however slight, which adds some nuance to the direct statement of prose".<sup>3</sup> Many of his prose passages have that

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, I, 232.

<sup>2</sup>R. L. Megroz, Joseph Conrad's Mind and Method, p. 41.

<sup>3</sup>William Empson, Seven Stages of Ambiguity, p. 1.





richness of multiple meaning which Empson says is characteristic of much of the world's best literature.

It can hardly be said that Conrad was a born stylist, since style was a conscious and painfully acquired business with him. As Crankshaw points out, he was a great writer, but not a born writer.

Conrad is one of the greatest writers of prose--but he had not style, style, without the article....Style in any medium is a use of that medium not as a medium at all but as an end. That is, the man with style is a born writer, while the man without it is not.<sup>1</sup>

Even when one allows for the self-abnegation and frank outpouring of emotion in the letters which he wrote to a few of his understanding friends, one must sympathize with a man whose soul could be so wrenched by the pain of writing--a man who would write such letters as this:

The fact however remains that this Rescue makes me miserable--frightens me--and I shall not abandon it--even temporarily. I must get on with it, and it will destroy my reputation. Sure!.... Thanks for your care, for your thought. Alas, no one can help me. In the matter of The Rescue, I have lost all sense of form and I can't see images. But what to write I know. I have the action, only the hand is paralyzed when it comes to giving expression to that action....<sup>2</sup>

As to the emotional impact of a word, Conrad maintains--just how literally one cannot say--that he who wishes to persuade should not depend upon the soundness of his argument, but upon "the right word".

<sup>1</sup>cf. Crankshaw, Joseph Conrad, VIII.

<sup>2</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, I, 237. (Letter to Garnett.)





....The power of sound has always been greater than the power of sense. I don't say this by way of disparagement. It is better for mankind to be impressionable than reflective. Nothing humanly great--great, I mean, as affecting a whole mass of lives--has come from reflection. On the other hand, you cannot fail to see the power of mere words: such words as Glory, for instance, or Pity. I won't mention any more. They are not far to seek. Shouted with perseverance, with ardour, with conviction, these two by their sound alone have set whole nations in motion and upheaved the dry, hard ground on which rests our whole social fabric....<sup>1</sup>

Words, he believes, are a sort of Archimedes lever; with the right word and the right accent one can move the world. What an opportunity for the writer! For written words have their accent, too.

....And then there is that accent. Another difficulty. For who is going to tell whether the accent is right or wrong till the word is shouted, and fails to be heard, perhaps, and goes down-wind, leaving the world unmoved? Once upon a time there lived an emperor who was a sage and something of a literary man. He jotted down on ivory tablets thoughts, maxims, reflections which chance has preserved for the edification of posterity. Among other sayings--I am quoting from memory--I remember this solemn admonition: "Let all thy words have the accent of heroic truth!" The accent of heroic truth! This is very fine, but I am thinking that it is an easy matter for an austere emperor to jot down grandiose advice. Most of the working truths on this earth are humble, not heroic; and there have been times in the history of mankind when the accents of heroic truth have moved it to nothing but derision.<sup>2</sup>

Another evidence of Conrad's insistence on the necessity of finding the exact word is to be found in a letter to Sir Hugh Clifford, in reference to Clifford's book, In A Corner of Asia.

<sup>1</sup>A Personal Record, pp. xiii-xiv.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. xiii-xiv.





Conrad says:

....You do not leave enough to the imagination. I do not mean as to facts....the facts cannot be too explicitly stated; I am alluding simply to the phrasing. True, a man who knows so much (without taking into account the manner in which his knowledge was acquired) may well spare himself the trouble of meditating over the words, only that words, groups of words, words standing alone, are symbols of life, have the power in their sound or in their aspect to present the very thing you wish to hold up before the mental vision of your readers. The things "as they are" exist in words; therefore words should be handled with care lest the picture, the image of truth abiding in facts, should become distorted--or blurred.

These are the considerations for a mere craftsman--you may say; and you may also conceivably say that I have nothing else to trouble my head about. However, the whole of the truth lies in the presentation; therefore the expression should be studied in the interest of veracity. This is the only morality of art apart from subject.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, I, 279.





## Chapter IX

## CONRAD'S CRITICISMS OF OTHER WRITERS

Another aspect of Conrad's "practical criticism"--other than that which is devoted to his own precepts for writing novels--is the estimate which he made of various other writers. The total body of this sort of criticism is small in Conrad. After all, he was not a professional reviewer and we do not find him issuing the neat collections of critical papers which came from the pens of his contemporaries in England--such books as Middleton Murry's Countries of the Mind, Arthur Quiller-Couch's Adventures in Criticism, and Lytton Strachey's Portraits in Miniature. Conrad's critical essays are thrown in rather haphazardly with the autobiographical material in Notes on Life and Letters and A Personal Record. Other literary estimates, more in the nature of obiter dicta, can be extracted from his letters.

We have gathered together a representative body of this material, fragmentary and impulsive as it sometimes is, in order to show something of the critical set of Conrad's mind, to exhibit him, so to speak, off his guard.





## Henry James

It is difficult to say whether Henry James "influenced" Conrad to any great extent; indeed, many of the surveys which attempt to find in the creative work of an original artist the "influence" of another artist are no more than harmless literary exercises which prove very little. But there is no doubt that Conrad admired heartily the technique of Henry James and respected him as a man. As early as 1905 he wrote a fairly illuminating essay on his fellow-novelist in which he said that twenty years' acquaintance with the work of James brought "a sense of happiness into one's artistic existence".<sup>1</sup>

He particularly appreciated the technical perfection of Henry James, as is indicated in the following letter to John Galsworthy, dated February 11, 1899:

Dearest Jack,

....He is cosmopolitan, civilized, very much homme du monde and the acquired (educated if you like) side of his temperament,--that is,--restraints, the instinctive, the nurtured, fostered, cherished side is always presented to the reader first....Technical perfection, unless there is some real glow to illumine and warm it from within, must necessarily be cold. I argue that in H. J. there is such a glow and not a dim one either, but to us used, absolutely accustomed to, unartistic expression of fine, headlong, honest (or dishonest) sentiments the art of H. J. does appear heartless. The outlines are so clear, the figures so finished, chiselled, carved and brought out that we exclaim--stone! Not at all. I say flesh and blood,--very perfectly presented,--perhaps with too much perfection of method....<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Printed in Notes on Life and Letters, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, I, 270-71.





Conrad called James the most civilized of modern writers, an idealizer whose heart shows itself in the delicacy of his handling. In this same letter he admitted that James is not forcible, or rather that the most forcible part of James is his technique, which is so fine that it dominates the bare expression. James is never in deep gloom or in violent sunshine, and the expression is only of delicate shades. But, says Conrad, "We cannot ask for more--not everyone is a Turgenev. Moreover, Turgenev is not civilized (therein much of his charm for us) in the same sense H. J. is civilized."

In commenting on the phrase that James is a historian of "fine consciences", Conrad says:

....The range of a fine conscience covers more good and evil than the range of consciences which may be called, roughly, not fine; a conscience, less troubled by the nice discrimination of shades of conduct. A fine conscience is more concerned with essentials; its triumphs are more perfect, if less profitable, in a worldly sense. There is, in short, more truth in its working for a historian to detect and to show. It is a thing of infinite complication and suggestion. None of these escapes the art of Mr. Henry James.<sup>1</sup>

It is reasonable to suppose that the finished technique which Conrad saw in James led him to emphasize this quality in his own literary theory and practice. Although Conrad never achieved writing which could be adequately described as "delicate", "carved", or "chiselled", and although he recognized a certain lack of force in James, he was nevertheless impressed by the ideal of technical perfection to which James held.

<sup>1</sup>Notes on Life and Letters, p. 16.





## Turgenev and Dostoievsky

Something of Conrad's opinion of these two Russians may be seen in a letter which he wrote to Edward Garnett on the occasion of the publication of a translation of Turgenev which Constance Garnett had done. He professes not to know Russian, not even the alphabet, and credits Garnett with having opened his eyes to the value and quality of Turgenev.

....As a boy I remember reading Smoke in a Polish translation (a feuilleton of some newspaper) and The Gentlefolks in French. I like those things purely by instinct (a very sound ground but not starting point for criticism) with which the consciousness of literary perfection had absolutely nothing to do. You opened my mind first to the appreciation of the art....As far as I know you are the only man who had seen T not only in his relation to mankind but in his relation to Russia. And he is great in both....<sup>1</sup>

Unlike Dostoievsky, whom Conrad calls a "grimacing haunted creature", Turgenev has every literary gift. Conrad credits him with "absolute sanity and the deepest sensibility, the clearest vision and the most exquisite responsiveness, penetrating insight for the significant, for the essential in human life and in the visible world".<sup>2</sup>

Another estimate of Dostoievsky appears in an earlier letter to Garnett (written in 1912). Conrad impatiently remarks:

I do hope you are not too disgusted with me for not thanking you for the "Karamazov" before. It was very good of you to remember me; and of

<sup>1</sup>Garnett, Letters From Joseph Conrad, pp. 248-49. (The letter was written in 1917.)

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.





course I was extremely interested. It's terrifically bad and impressive and exasperating. Moreover, I don't know what D stands for or reveals, but I do know that he is too Russian for me. It sounds to me like some fierce mouthings from prehistoric ages. I understand the Russians have just discovered him. I wish them joy.<sup>1</sup>

This reaction, of course, is an emotional one; Conrad seems to be allowing himself the luxury of venting his irritation without reflection. Perhaps the expansiveness of Dostoievsky affronted Conrad's artistic sense; perhaps the brutal realism was more than he could stomach.

Just what influence the Russian writers had on Conrad is hard to determine. Judging from his own remarks, that influence was small. He insists that his knowledge of Russian literature was confined to translations, and that apart from Polish, most of his reading came from the English and French.

Casual readers of Conrad are tempted to explain whatever seems obscure or enigmatical in his mind by referring to the "Slavic influence" in his life, as if a Slav were a quite distinctive and alien representative of human nature. H. L. Mencken's vigorous and sometimes discerning essay on Conrad makes much of this Slavonism in Conrad, somewhat to the annoyance of the novelist. In a letter to George T. Keating he speaks of the brilliance and warmth of Mencken's essay, but explodes the Slavic myth. The letter is doubly interesting because it reveals significant details about his cultural background. Part of the letter follows:

<sup>1</sup>Garnett, Letters From Joseph Conrad, p. 240.





....What, however, surprises me is that a personality so genuine in its sensations, so independent in judgment, should now and then condescend to mere parrot talk; for his harping on my Slavonism is only that. I wonder what meaning he attaches to the word? Does he mean by it primitive natures fashioned by a Byzantine theological conception of life, with an inclination to perverted mysticism? Then it cannot possibly apply to me. Racially I belong to a group which has historically a political past, with a Western Roman culture derived at first from Italy and then from France; and a rather Southern temperament; an outpost of Westernism with a Roman tradition, situated between Slav-Tartar Byzantine barbarism on one side and the German tribes on the other; resisting both influences desperately and still remaining true to itself to this very day. I went out into the world before I was seventeen, to France and England, and in neither country did I feel myself a stranger for a moment: neither as regards ideas, sentiments, nor institutions. If he means that I have been influenced by so-called Slavonic literature then he is utterly wrong. I suppose he means Russian; but as a matter of fact I never knew Russian. The few novels I have read I have read in translation. Their mentality and their emotionalism have been always repugnant to me, hereditarily and individually. Apart from Polish my youth has been fed on French and English literature. While I was a boy in a great public school we were steeped in classicism to the lips, and, though our historical studies were naturally tinted with Germanism, I know that all we boys, the six hundred of us, resisted that influence with all our might, while accepting the results of German research and thoroughness. And that was only natural. I am a child, not of a savage but of a chivalrous tradition, and if my mind took a tinge from anything it was from French romanticism perhaps. It was fed on ideas, not of revolt but of liberalism of a perfectly disinterested kind, and on severe moral lessons of national misfortune. Of course I broke away early. Excess of individualism perhaps? But that, and other things, I have settled a long time ago with my conscience.





I admit I was never an average, able boy.  
 As a matter of fact, I was not able at all.  
 In whatever I have achieved afterwards I have  
 simply followed my instinct: the voice from  
 inside. Mencken might have given me the credit  
 of being just an individual somewhat out of the  
 common, instead of ramming me into a category,  
 which proceeding, anyhow, is an exploded superstition.<sup>1</sup>

Conrad's theory of the novel must have been shaped to some extent by his reading of the great Russians--this is no more than to say that it was shaped to some extent by all of the important writers whom he observed--but it is evident from the foregoing letter that the "Slavic influence" on his critical theory has been exaggerated. We should, for example, regard in the light of Conrad's expressed distaste for Dostoevsky the following sentence from a well-known survey of the English novel:

....It may be that his Slavic blood shows itself in sympathy with the great Russian novelists, especially Dostoevsky, in the recognition of what modern critics call the incongruity of character.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, II, 288-89.

<sup>2</sup>Lovett and Hughes, History of the Novel in England, p. 408. (*Italics mine.*)





## Stephen Crane

The present writer has been told by Mrs. Camille Ingalls of Boston, who lived with the Crane family when they were neighbors of Conrad, that the older author was very fond of the young American and was highly appreciative of his work. Naturally he was much interested in The Open Boat and said that Crane had caught the real spirit of the situation. And a man who had created such a character as Lord Jim could sympathize with the agony of the Young Soldier in The Red Badge of Courage.

In the preface to an edition of The Red Badge of Courage which was printed in 1925, after Conrad's death, appeared some statements which Conrad had made in 1923. Concerning the Young Soldier he wrote:

....But the lot of the mass of mankind is to know fear, the decent fear of disgrace. Of such is the Young Soldier of The Red Badge of Courage. He only seems exceptional because he has got inside of him Stephen Crane's imagination, and is presented to us with the insight and the power of expression of an artist whom a just and severe critic, on a review of all his work, has called the foremost impressionist of his time; as Sterne was the greatest impressionist, but in a different way, of his age.<sup>1</sup>

Conrad had just finished reading the novel when Crane arrived in England. A partner in the publishing house of William Heinemann asked if there was anybody Crane wanted to meet, and he mentioned two names, one of which was Conrad. Evidently the American had been deeply impressed by The Nigger of the Narcissus and wanted to meet the author. Conrad says

<sup>1</sup>Edition published by William Heinemann, Ltd., p. x.





of their meeting: "I saw a young man of medium stature and slender build, with very steady, penetrating blue eyes, the eyes of a being who not only sees visions but can brood over them to some purpose."<sup>1</sup>

Allowing for a slight fulsomeness which was prompted by his personal liking for Crane, Conrad had seized upon the valuable elements in Crane's writing.

He had indeed a wonderful power of vision, which he applied to the things of this earth and of our mortal humanity with a penetrating force that seemed to reach, within life's appearances and forms, the very spirit of life's truth. His ignorance of the world at large--he had seen very little of it--did not stand in the way of imaginative grasp of facts, events, and picturesque men.....He knew little of literature, either of his own country or of any other, but he was himself a wonderful artist in words whenever he took a pen into his hand. Then his gift came out--and it was seen then to be much more than mere felicity of language. His impressionism of phrase went really deeper than the surface. In his writing he was very sure of his effects. I don't think he was ever in doubt about what he could do. Yet it often seemed to me that he was but half aware of the exceptional quality of his achievement.<sup>2</sup>

That Conrad was aware of the limitations of Crane's literary gifts is evidenced by the following paragraph:

This achievement was curtailed by his early death. It was a great loss to his friends, but perhaps not nearly so much to literature. I think that he had given his measure fully in the few books he had time to write. Let me not be misunderstood: the loss was great, but it was the loss of the delight his art could give, not the loss of any further possible revelation....<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"Stephen Crane", Notes on Life and Letters, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.





Conrad had a warm liking for this young man, whose "passage on this earth was like that of a horseman riding swiftly in the dawn of a day fated to be short and without sunshine".<sup>1</sup> But he was a much older and more experienced man than Crane, and his literary productivity had been much more substantial; therefore, it is unlikely that Crane had any more effect on his critical theory than would naturally appear when two intelligent artists gossip together about the technique of their art.

<sup>1</sup>"Stephen Crane", Notes on Life and Letters, p. 50.





## Daudet

As early as 1898 Conrad wrote an essay on Daudet in which he described the central values in this writer. It is almost as if he were describing himself when he says of Daudet: "What strikes one most in his work is the disinterestedness of the toiler."<sup>1</sup> Conrad admired him because he did not preach about himself or persuade his fellows into a belief in his own greatness, nor did he pose as "a scientist or as a seer, not even as a prophet."

He did not regard Daudet as a great writer, but as one who deserved the affection of the many, a simple man who was content to take an eager part in the trials, mistakes, and joys which are tragic enough, "but by no means so momentous and profound as some writers, probably for the sake of Art, would like to make us believe."

Then comes a paragraph which illustrates the terrible disquietude and stoicism which occasionally flashes in and out of Conrad's writing. It is not often that he allows his restraint to waver, that he becomes as grimly ironical as this:

And Daudet was honest; perhaps because he knew no better--but he was very honest. If he saw only the surface of things it is for the reason that most things have nothing but a surface. He did not pretend--perhaps because he

<sup>1</sup>"Daudet", Notes on Life and Letters, p. 20.





did not know how--he did not pretend to see any depths in a life that is only a film of unsteady appearances stretched over regions deep indeed, but which have nothing to do with the half-truths, half-thoughts, and whole illusions of existence. The road to these distant regions does not lie through the domain of Art or the domain of Science where well-known voices quarrel noisily in a misty emptiness; it is a path of toilsome silence upon which travel men simple and unknown, with closed lips, or, may be, whispering their pain softly--only to themselves.<sup>1</sup>

Daudet, according to Conrad, saw life with extreme clearness and hastened to offer it his pity, wonder, and anger--tolerating venial sins and grave mistakes, but detesting hardness of heart. He cares greatly for his broken-down actors, exiled queens, deformed sempstresses, and stupid Academicians. He may seem at times transparent and melodramatic, till "suddenly the very naivete of it all touches us with the revealed suggestion of a truth....He may not be an artist, but he comes as near the truth as some of the greatest."

<sup>1</sup>"Daudet", Notes on Life and Letters, p. 22.





## Guy de Maupassant

Conrad admired Maupassant for a practical and resolute mind, and a consummate simplicity of technique. Recognizing the determinism of the Frenchman's view of life and human nature, Conrad condoned it by the rather questionable statement that "the worth of every conviction consists precisely in the steadfastness with which it is held". In other words, if our feelings are hurt because Maupassant did not use his talents for the praise and consolation of mankind, our intelligence should make us see that he was a splendid sinner in his devotion to the truth as he saw it.<sup>1</sup> This essay, written in 1904, is interesting because it reveals the same Conrad who appeared in the earlier essay on Daudet--a steadfast stoic in the face of an incomprehensible universe.

He speaks of Maupassant's austerity, using A Piece of String and A Sale as examples.

How many openings the last offers for the gratuitous display of the author's wit or clever buffoonry, the first for an unmeasured display of sentiment! And both sentiment and buffoonry could have been made very good too, in a way accessible to the meanest intelligence, at the cost of truth and honesty. Here it is where Maupassant's austerity comes in. He refrains from setting his cleverness against the eloquence of the facts. There is humour and pathos in these stories; but such is the greatness of his talent, the refinement of his artistic conscience, that all his high qualities appear inherent in the very things of which he speaks, as if they had been altogether independent of his presentation. Facts and again facts are his unique concern.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"Guy de Maupassant", Notes on Life and Letters, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.





He praises Maupassant for the perfect rendering of these facts, which like the actualities of life itself, demand from the reader a power of observation and appreciation greater than "a vague susceptibility to emotion". His clearness and simplicity make him universally comprehensible, but it was achieved at the cost of great pain. It is natural that a writer like Conrad, extremely interested in style, should admire the devotion which Maupassant expended on "the right word."

Conrad has a sharp word for those who object to the grimness and "brutality" of Maupassant; he prefers to describe this quality as "masculinity without display, virility without a pose". Maupassant was tender enough to human beings, but had the literary honesty to illustrate his conclusions by what he saw before him, never condescending to invent anything or to pretend anything--or to stoop to "the miserable vanity of a catching phrase". Conrad adds:

This is literary honesty. It may be remarked that it does not differ very greatly from the ideal honesty of the respectable majority, from the honesty of lawgivers, of warriors, of kings, of bricklayers, of all those who express their fundamental sentiment in the ordinary course of their activities, by the work of their hands.<sup>1</sup>

Maupassant renders his visions "with that exact knowledge of the means and that absolute devotion to the aim of creating effects--which is art".

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 31.





Maupassant was a true and dutiful lover of our earth. He says himself in one of his descriptive passages: Nous autres que séduit la terre.... It was true. The earth had for him a compelling charm. He looks upon her august and furrowed face with the fierce insight of real passion. His is the power of detecting the one immutable quality that matters in the changing aspects of nature and under the ever-shifting aspects of life. To say that he could not embrace in his glance all its magnificence and all its misery is only to say that he was human.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.





## Anatole France

Conrad's essay on Anatole France appeared in 1904. Here again we find him praising those virtues which seem to have excited his admiration whenever he met them: compassion for the weaknesses of ordinary people, strong convictions expressed with artistry, a hatred of sentimentality, courage and persistence even when all seems lost. France, says Conrad, realized that political institutions, whether contrived by philosopher-kings or by the fumbling of the masses, cannot ensure the happiness of mankind. He searches and probes man's illusions with profound compassion, and expresses his convictions with measure, restraint, and harmony.<sup>1</sup>

France felt, as did Conrad, that men "condemned to struggle with error and passions through endless centuries should be spared the supreme cruelty of hope forever deferred."<sup>2</sup> Knowing that heaven is unattainable, man has the incredible misfortune--and the highest privilege--of being able to aspire towards the impossible. Only in this ceaseless effort, in this "consoling illusion of power and intelligent purpose", is there any surcease from despair.

Then comes a page of reproof which is an interesting reflection of Conrad's social philosophy. Born of an aristocratic family and endowed with a naturally delicate sense of social hierarchies--even though he never failed to understand the common man--he was always very skeptical about

<sup>1</sup>"Anatole France", Notes on Life and Letters, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 34.





the fashionable humanitarianism of his day. He could not, for example, understand the Fabian activities of G. B. Shaw. He remarks that Anatole France is something of a Socialist; and in that respect "he seems to depart from his skeptical philosophy". Socialism, like religion, has its dogmas, but its cohesive strength lies in its ideals. But the ideals are too materialistic, and Conrad suspects that France finds no real comfort in them.

....He will disregard the stupidity of the dogma and the unlovely form of the ideal. His art will find its own beauty in the imaginative presentations of wrongs, of errors, and miseries that call aloud for redress. M. Anatole France is humane. He is also human. He may be able to discard his philosophy; to forget that the evils are many and the remedies are few, that there is no universal panacea, that fatality is invincible, that there is an implacable menace of death in the triumph of the humanitarian idea. He may forget all that because love is stronger than truth.<sup>1</sup>

In 1919, discussing the partition of Poland in the eighteenth century,<sup>2</sup> Conrad explained that international brigandage by saying that Poland was perfectly defenseless from a material point of view, "and more than ever, perhaps, inclined to put its faith in humanitarian illusions...." Not only is this and other statements in the essay a misreading of Polish history, but it is another indication of Conrad's naivete in matters of social and governmental techniques. While he was quite aware that men, especially little men, suffer from the ills of a malfunctioning society, he has no program of relief

<sup>1</sup>"Anatole France", pp. 37-38.

<sup>2</sup>"The Crime of Partition", in Notes on Life and Letters, pp. 116-117.





to offer to them. While he pities them, he makes no other comment than that remedies are few, that there is no universal panacea, and that fatality is invincible.

After reproving France's socialism, Conrad praises him for coolness of thought and says that his books are prodigal descriptions of the famous "adventures of a choice soul amongst masterpieces". As one contemplates his excellences, "one becomes aware of the futility of literary watchwords and the vanity of all schools of fiction". This does not mean that France is a wild and untrammelled genius; he has a knowledge of the past, and possesses a "critical temperament joined to creative power."<sup>1</sup>

#### Miscellaneous critical comment

In addition to his more or less formal comment on certain authors, Conrad has a scattering of obiter dicta which appear in his letters and prefaces. These are interesting not so much as evidences of a central critical theory but as the unpremeditated responses of a restless and impulsive mind to the literature of the day.

#### Flaubert

Although he mentions Flaubert as one of his favorite writers, Conrad makes no detailed analysis of the Frenchman's work. He believed in the Flaubertian principle of aloofness

<sup>1</sup>"Anatole France", pp. 40-41.





on the part of the author, and tried to treat the character of Almayer, for instance, as dispassionately as Flaubert tried to write of Emma Bovary. The most extended comment which he makes about Flaubert appears in his A Personal Record:

Books may be written in all sorts of places. Verbal inspiration may enter the berth of a mariner on board a ship frozen fast in a river in the middle of a town; and since saints are supposed to look benignantly on humble believers, I indulge in the pleasant fancy that the shade of old Flaubert--who imagined himself to be (amongst other things) a descendant of the Vikings--might have hovered with amused interest over the decks of a 2000-ton steamer called the Adowa, on board of which, gripped by the inclement winter alongside a quay in Rouen, the tenth chapter of Almayer's Folly was begun. With interest, I say, for was not the kind Norman giant with enormous moustaches and a thundering voice the last of the Romantics? Was he not, in his unworldly, almost ascetic devotion to his art a sort of literary, saint-like hermit?<sup>1</sup>

#### Fenimore Cooper

Richard Curle testifies that certain writers appealed to Conrad for reasons other than artistic. Among these were Fenimore Cooper and Captain Marryat, whose adventure stories he preferred to Moby Dick. "Indeed," says Curle, "he spoke very disparagingly to me about Melville on several occasions; he objected to his portentous mysticism."<sup>2</sup>

In a letter to David Garnett, dated December 22, 1902, Conrad said:

My Dear Boy:

We have sent off three volumes of the "Leather-Stocking Tales"--one from each of us--with our love to you. You have promised me to read these stories and I would recommend you to begin with the

<sup>1</sup>A Personal Record, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>The Last Twelve Years of Joseph Conrad, p. 109.





Last of the Mohicans--then go on with the Deerslayer and end with the Prairie. I read them at your age in that order; and I trust that you, of a much later generation, shall find in these pages some at least of the charm which delighted me then and has not evaporated even to this day.<sup>1</sup>

### Marcel Proust

In 1923 C. K. Scott Moncrieff collected some essays in praise of Marcel Proust and published them under the title of Marcel Proust--An English Tribute. One of the essayists was Joseph Conrad, whose opinion of the Frenchman may be judged from this paragraph:

Those that have found beauty in Proust's work are perfectly right. It is there. What amazes one is its inexplicable character. In that prose so full of life there is no reverie, no emotion, no marked irony, no warmth of conviction, not even a marked sense of rhythm to charm our ear. It appeals to our sense of wonder and gains our homage by its veiled greatness. I don't think there ever has been in the whole of literature such an example of the power of analysis, and I feel pretty safe in saying that there will never be another.<sup>2</sup>

This is an example of the incoherence and indecision which occasionally shows up in Conrad's critical writing. The rest of the essay is little better than this.

### Hugh Walpole

Hugh Walpole was a good friend to Conrad, who very frequently had laudatory things to say of his fellow novelist. In a book of Appreciations of Walpole, Conrad says:

We see Mr. Walpole grappling with the truth of things spiritual and material with his characteristic earnestness, and we can discern the characteristics of this acute and sympathetic explorer of human nature:

<sup>1</sup>Edward Garnett, Letters From Joseph Conrad, p. 185.

<sup>2</sup>p. 27.





His love of adventure and the serious audacity he brings to the task of recording the changes of human fate and the movements of human emotion, in the quiet backwaters or in the tumultuous open streams of existence.<sup>1</sup>

### Other writers

R. L. Megroz tells of a conversation he had with Conrad in the course of which the novelist described some of his literary enthusiasms. Part of the conversation is reproduced here to indicate the range of Conrad's reading.

"It is difficult to name favorites in literature," he said, "because literature comes into different compartments. I consider Dickens quite a great man; his work is wonderful. Between verse and prose it is prose which has my greatest admiration....One day my friend Hueffer gave me a fifteenth or sixteenth century Bible, and it had an Introduction. I cannot remember the name of the writer. The Introduction was in translation, and it was a most admirable piece of prose. I never forget it. It seems to me so marvellous because of the age in which it was written. I have the greatest respect for the writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but not so much for those of the eighteenth. Men like Addison leave me cold. On the other hand Johnson has some of those qualities which command my admiration. The manliness, the clearness, of his prose in, for instance, The Lives of the Poets. That is the book of Dr. Johnson!"

"To go back to the fifteenth [sic] century, do you enjoy reading Jeremy Taylor's prose?"

Conrad jerked forward from the depths of his chair and faced me, his sardonic face as nearly beaming as I had ever seen it.

"Now, whatever made you think of that?" he threw at me. "One hardly ever mentions Jeremy Taylor, and I think his prose is wonderful. I can always read him, not for what he says, you know, but for the language, the exquisite music."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hugh Walpole--Appreciations by Jos. Conrad, Arnold Bennett, Joseph Hergesheimer, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>R. L. Megroz, A Talk With Joseph Conrad, p. 45.





He writes to John Galsworthy, and speaking of the British censor, remarks:

I suppose he knew what he was doing when he choked d'Annunzio, that dreary, dreary saltimbique of passion (out of his original Italian of which I know nothing), and Maeterlinck, the farceur, who has been hiding an appalling poverty of ideas and hollowness of sentiment in wistful baby-talk,-- two consecrated reputations, not to speak of the sacrosanct Ibsen, of whom, like Mrs. Verloc of Ossipon, I prefer to say nothing.<sup>1</sup>

There is an interesting reference to his attitude toward poetry in a letter to R. B. Cunninghame Graham written in 1899.

In a little while came the books. Vous me gêtez. I've read Vathek at once. C'est très bien. What an infernal imagination! The style is cold and I do not see in the work that immense promise as set forth by the introduction. Chaucer I have dipped into, reading aloud as you advised. I am afraid I am not English enough to appreciate fully the father of English literature. Moreover I am in general insensible to verse.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of the highly poetic nature of his own prose, Conrad seems not to have written any verse, or to have understood in any responsive fashion the poetry of his adopted country.<sup>3</sup>

We can summarize this section on his critical remarks by saying that the most important part of Conrad's criticism is not that which is devoted to the appraisal of specific books by particular authors. The only examples we have of this sort of material are a handful of short essays and a number of informal comments which appear in his letters to friends.

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, II, 62.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., I, 273.

<sup>3</sup>For further scattered literary opinions of Conrad, see his letter to Mme Angele Zagorska in Jean-Aubry's Joseph Conrad, I, 264





The most substantial part of his criticism is that devoted to general problems of artistic creation and to the particular problems which he met in his own fiction.

We can, however, learn something of his critical attitudes by reading what he had to say of other writers and their books. He was a keen student of technique, and admired the careful workmanship of men like James, Proust, and Maupassant. He appreciated the virtue of disinterested toil in Daudet and Flaubert, the power of vision which he saw in Crane and Turgeniev. He repeatedly emphasizes that a good writer must have the qualities of sincerity, pity and objectivity.





## Chapter X

## THE TYPE OF CRITIC CONRAD IS

It is now necessary to make some general observations about the type of critic Conrad is. What are the outstanding critical tenets in his writings? What is his critical temper? Can he be placed in any particular school of criticism? The first topic which we shall discuss is what may be called his empiricism, by which we mean "his reliance upon practical experience and observation, without a dependence upon consciously learned theory and science."

It would seem that Conrad, half regretfully, subscribed to the viewpoint that criticism is a highly individual, personalized activity not at all dependent on "the Rules". Referring to a debate between Ferdinand Brunetiere and Anatole France over the principles of literary criticism, he says:

As was fitting for a man to whom we owe the memorable saying, "The good critic is he who relates the adventures of his soul amongst masterpieces", M. Anatole France maintained that there were no rules and no principles [sic] and that may be true. Rules, principles and standards die and vanish every day. These, if ever, are the brave free days of destroyed landmarks, while the ingenious minds are busy inventing the forms of the new beacons which, it is consoling to think, will be set up presently in the old places. But what is interesting to a writer is the possession of an inward certitude that literary criticism will never die, for man (so variously defined) is, before everything else, a critical animal. And, as long as distinguished minds are ready to treat it in the spirit of high adventure, literary criticism shall appeal to us with all the charm and wisdom of a well-told tale of personal experience.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>A Personal Record, p. 95.





Again, speaking of the variability of the rules for criticism, he says:

No secret of eternal life for our books can be found amongst the formulas of art, any more than for our bodies in a prescribed combination of drugs. This is not because some books are not worthy of enduring life, but because the formulas of art are dependent on things variable, unstable and untrustworthy; on human sympathies, on prejudices, on likes and dislikes, on the sense of virtue and the sense of propriety, on beliefs and theories that, indestructible in themselves, always change their form--often in the lifetime of one fleeting generation.<sup>1</sup>

There is not much evidence that Conrad was familiar with the works of Vida, Castelvetro, Scaliger, or Boileau, but it is quite evident that he would have had little patience with elaborate formulations of literary doctrines or with rigidly established "rules"--even if they do have the august sanction of Aristotle or Horace.

Now, a writer who embarks upon a creative endeavor in the full confidence that he can find his way without the conventional guideposts, who does not need the bracing of a set of formulae, may be called an empiricist. And, to a certain extent, Conrad is such a writer. In the preface to his Letters From Joseph Conrad, Edward Garnett says:

To return to "Karain", Conrad's letters to me show that he had not, as Mr. Munro states in his Introduction to The Nigger of the Narcissus, Memorial Edition, "thrashed out for himself theories and convictions on the art of fiction through years of concentrated lonely thoughts at sea." Conrad worked by intuition after a preliminary meditation, just as his criticism of other men's work was intuitive and not the fruit of considered theory.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"Books", in Notes on Life and Letters, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>pp. 24-25.





Garnett's point can be accepted only after a little reservation. It is immediately apparent, of course, that Conrad's literary and cultural background inevitably supplied him with certain definite conceptions about creative writing. He does his work partly by intuition--as every original artist does--but his "preliminary meditation" was of such intensity as to deserve the name of critical endeavor, even if that theory which he developed were not insisted upon and elaborated until after the work of art was completed.

Crankshaw is right when he says that Conrad was always aware of his goals, that he sought consciously for effects.

Conrad is particularly interesting to study as a novelist in the abstract, as it were, because there was no unchannelled outpouring about him. Like Henry James he was always calculating his effect. I do not suggest that he sat down in what is known as cold blood to calculate heartlessly and with meticulous precision the exact trick he would employ at this or that juncture to sweep the reader off his feet in the required direction, like a wood-cutter felling a tree. On the contrary, he seems to have worked in a state of semi-blindness, calculating as the need arose, crossing his bridges as they came, living, so to speak, from hand to mouth. Calculation none the less, and just as actual as the celebrated Jamesian calculation, the long, dictated cerebral perambulations in the course of which a book was somehow twirled and twisted into shape.<sup>1</sup>

Garnett admits that Conrad "was, of course, always interested in literary technique and good craftsmanship", although he had never "formulated any rules for his own practice." It is true that Conrad never set down rules in the concise fashion of the Ars Poetica or the Essay on Criticism, but it

<sup>1</sup>Crankshaw, op. cit., p. 10.





has been demonstrated that he nevertheless evolved a well-considered literary theory within limits which, in his later years, he took pleasure in discussing. This theory, both of criticism and of novel-writing, was arrived at as a result of experimentation, consultation with friends who were also in search of the secret of literary effectiveness, and reams of paper covered with corrections and deletions--and finally thrown away. Certainly one cannot visualize him learning to be a critic and novelist by poring over Winchester's Principles of Literary Criticism, Clayton Hamilton's Art of Fiction, or books of the sort.

Conrad's experimental empiricism is shown by the fact that while he was an independent artist, Conrad was not a radical. While vigorous in the statement of his own theory, he had no intention of proselytizing others. While capable of making his own choices in the end, he was willing to learn from his associates. He could, on the one hand, say:

Everyone must walk in the light of his own heart's gospel. No man's light is good to any of his fellows. That's my creed from beginning to end. That's my view of life--a view that rejects all formulas, dogmas, and principles of other people's making. These are a web of illusions. We are too varied. Another man's truth is only a dismal lie to me....<sup>1</sup>

and yet with the greatest humility he could accept the detailed criticisms and judgments of his friends--men like Ford Madox Ford, Curle, Galsworthy, Wells, Garnett, Crane, and other writers and critics of his time. He would probably

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, I, 184.





have admitted the truth of T. S. Eliot's remark:

A common inheritance and a common cause unite artists consciously or unconsciously: it must be admitted that the union is mostly unconscious. Between the true artists of any time there is, I believe, an unconscious community....If such views are held about art, it follows a fortiori whoever holds them must hold similar views about criticism.<sup>1</sup>

As his admiration of Anatole France would suggest, Conrad feels that the last court of appeal in judging a work of art is the impression which each reader gets from it. Judgments are almost entirely subjective, depending on all sorts of variables in character, training, and prepossessions which various critics have. The work of art goes forth defenceless, with no apologies or explanations. It is at the mercy of its wide audience. Yet, for all his reliance on individual emotional reactions, Conrad felt that a "sensitive soul among masterpieces" could sometimes make good use of an objective guide or explanation. In one of the last letters he ever wrote, he says to F. N. Doubleday:

....Moreover, I think that an author who tries to "explain" is exposing himself to a very great risk--the risk of confessing himself a failure. For a work of art should speak for itself. Yet much could be said on the other side; for it is also clear that a work of art is not a logical demonstration carrying its intention on the face of it.<sup>2</sup>

Impressions which spring from ignorance or a hasty temper, then, do not make good criticism. Conrad would say, with Croce, that the good critic, no matter what "school" he belongs to, must have artistic experience, taste, and knowledge.

<sup>1</sup>Selected Essays, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, II, 344.





Quite often Conrad becomes irritated at the pedestrian and niggardly criticism of some contemporary writers who evidently lacked discipline, insight, and sympathy. He counsels the creative artist to possess his soul in patience:

If it be permissible to twist, invest, adapt (and spoil) M. Anatole France's definition of a good critic, then let us say that the good author is he who contemplates without marked joy or excessive sorrow the adventures of his soul amongst criticisms.<sup>1</sup>

Not only does bluntness of impressions offend him, but also glibness and prettiness in criticism. In a letter to Stephen Reynolds he writes:

I am not a critic, as you know, nor a man to utter pretty, beautiful, or deep things about a book. I keep no store of pregnant phrases. The usual civilities I could write to a young author, I dare say, if I tried very hard.<sup>2</sup>

Conrad's impressionism, then, is that of an informed and sympathetic person. It is buttressed by knowledge, and free from insincerity and flippancy. Yet Conrad falls into an old difficulty in criticism--the conflict between reason and emotion. He makes this familiar complaint:

To pronounce a judgment upon the general tendency of an author is a difficult task. One could not depend upon reason alone, nor yet trust solely to one's own emotions. Used together, they would in many cases traverse each other, because emotions have their own unanswerable logic. Our capacity for emotion is limited, and the field of our intelligence is restricted. Responsiveness to every feeling, combined with the penetration of every intellectual subterfuge, would end, not in judgment, but in universal absolution. Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner. And in this benevolent neutrality towards the warring errors of human nature all light would go out from art and from life.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>A Personal Record, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, II, 84.

<sup>3</sup>"Guy de Maupassant", Notes on Life and Letters, p. 25.





As between the two--the emotional and impressionistic, and the rational and scientific--Conrad would emphasize the former. It is difficult for any critic to escape the conflict here. The first may easily result in irresponsibility or mere whimsy. The second, if it turns away from the essential substance of the work of art, is no longer purely scientific. The rational, scientific critic often takes refuge in historical and technical investigation. As Orlo Williams says, the libraries of the world are full of their work. "The best that can be said of it....is that it arrives at facts, when its deductions are correct: but these facts, however important historically, from the point of view of art are either secondary or irrelevant."<sup>1</sup>

Despite its disabilities as a method, Conrad is willing to trust to impressionism. Men change, their convictions toughen or relax as time goes on, art has no one exclusive meaning, and the symbolism of art is complex. Therefore the critic can trust only to his own sensibilities and perceptions. In a letter to Barrett H. Clark, dated May 4, 1918, Conrad says:

....Some critics have found fault with me for not being constantly myself. But they are wrong. I am always myself. I am a man of formed character. Certain conclusions remain immovably fixed in my mind, but I am no slave to prejudices and formulas, and I shall never be. My attitude to subjects and expressions, the angles of vision, my methods of composition will, within limits, be always changing--not because I am unstable or unprincipled but because I am free. Or perhaps it

<sup>1</sup>op. cit., pp. 88-89.





may be more exact to say, because I am always trying for freedom within my limits.

Coming now to the subject of your inquiry, I wish at first to put before you a general proposition: that a work of art is very seldom limited to one exclusive meaning and not necessarily tending to a definite conclusion. And this for the reason that the nearer it approaches art, the more it acquires a symbolic character. This statement may surprise you, who may imagine that I am alluding to the Symbolist School of poets or prose writers. Theirs, however, is only a literary proceeding against which I have nothing to say. I am concerned here with something much larger. But no doubt you have meditated on this and kindred questions yourself.

So I will only call your attention to the fact that the symbolic conception of a work of art has this advantage, that it makes a triple appeal covering the whole field of life. All the great creations of literature have been symbolic, and in that way have gained in complexity, in power, in depth and in beauty.

I don't think you will quarrel with me on the ground of lack of precision; for as to precision of images and analysis my artistic conscience is at rest. I have given there all the truth that is in me; and all that the critics may say can make my honesty neither more nor less. But as to "Final effect" my conscience has nothing to do with that. It is the critic's affair to bring to its contemplation his own honesty, his sensibility and intelligence. The Matter for his conscience is just his judgment. If his conscience is busy with petty scruples and trammelled by superficial formulas then his judgment will be superficial and petty. But an artist has no right to quarrel with the inspirations, either lofty or base, of another soul. [*Italics mine*] <sup>1</sup>

The last sentence in the foregoing quotation has an echo in another statement which he made to Hugh Clifford when he offered a criticism of the latter's book, A Free Lance of Today. Typically deferential, he says:

<sup>1</sup>Jean-Aubry, Joseph Conrad, II, 204.





Of course I may have misunderstood your intention. The most intelligent among us are very stupid and I don't lay claim to an exceptional dose of intelligence. Moreover you know my opinion--that criticism is a vain thing against a man's conceptions as to life, character, morality, and whatever else goes to make up the only truth that matters. Criticism can be applied usefully only to facts--which don't matter.<sup>1</sup>

The critic's view of a work of art, like the artist's view of the external world, is a subjective one. The value of a critical work, like the value of any creative writing, is dependent on the honesty, the conscience, of the writer. In reference to the stories in the volume entitled Typhoon, Conrad says:

With each the question is what the writer has done with his opportunity; and each answers the question for itself in words which, if I may say so without undue solemnity, were written with a conscientious regard for the truth of my own sensations. And each of those stories, to mean something, must justify itself in its own way to the conscience of each successive reader.<sup>2</sup>

In the achievement of this honesty of conscience, it is not necessary to belong to any school of criticism or to subscribe to any of the temporary formulas of the writer's craft. As William Lyons Phelps says, Conrad believes that liberty of imagination is the most precious possession of a novelist, that "no matter how objective a novelist may be, he never describes the world--he describes his own world, the world as he sees it. And in order to describe even this subjective world, he must rid himself....of artistic dogmas." <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ibid., I, 309-310.

<sup>2</sup>Typhoon, Author's Note, p. ix.

<sup>3</sup>"Advance of the English Novel", Bookman Magazine 43: 297-304, May, 1916.





In the preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus, Conrad says that the artist, in a tender but fearless effort to disclose the inspiring secret of reality, must be single-minded and truthful. If he succeeds, he cannot then be faithful to any of the changing credos of the craft.

The enduring part of them--the truth which each only imperfectly veils--should abide with him as the most precious of his possessions, but they all: Realism, Romanticism, Naturalism, even the unofficial sentimentalism (which like the poor, is exceedingly difficult to get rid of,) all these gods must, after a short period of fellowship, abandon him--even on the very threshold of the temple--to the stammerings of his conscience and to the outspoken consciousness of the difficulties of his work.<sup>1</sup>

Before proceeding with our final summary, which will be an attempt to place Conrad among the critics of his day, we can make a number of more or less isolated reflections on his critical temper. This part of the discussion, therefore, will consist of a series of summary inferences which can be drawn from the bulk of his critical writings.

First, Conrad is a "self-conscious" critic, earnestly considering the technique and the purpose of his own writing. In this respect he is in a good tradition: that of Dryden's prefaces, Johnson's Lives, Wordsworth's Preface, Shelley's Defence, and Eliot's Selected Essays. It is apparent from the present study that much of Conrad's criticism is directed toward his own work and that of his fellow novelists; it is pragmatic in nature and has the very practical purpose of

<sup>1</sup>The Nigger of the Narcissus, pp. xiv-xv.





perfecting his gift for spinning yarns. Certainly it is hard to find another author who so painstakingly criticized himself. As Eliot says:

....Probably, indeed, the larger part of the labour of an author is critical labour; the labour of sifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing: this frightful toil is as much critical as creative. I maintain even that the criticism employed by a trained and skilled writer on his own work is the most vital, the highest kind of criticism; and (as I think I have said before) that some creative writers are superior to others solely because their critical faculty is superior.<sup>1</sup>

To say that Conrad is a highly self-conscious critic does not mean that he is on that account a great artist; and conversely the great artist is not necessarily a great critic. When Conrad criticizes the work of other artists we do not regard him as authoritative simply because he has the faculty of criticizing himself. We can place faith in him, however, if we are convinced that he understood and acted upon a definite philosophy, that he held to certain literary credos above and beyond his own narrow sphere of literary excellence.

Second, Conrad is often over-generous and prejudiced in his criticism of the writings of his friends. This failing shows up more in his letters than in his essays. It is difficult to believe that the books of the Garnetts, Hugh Clifford, Marguerite Poradowska, Ford Madox Hueffer and others are so important and excellently contrived as he makes them

<sup>1</sup>T. S. Eliot, op. cit., p. 18.





appear. His capacity for friendship and gratitude was notable; and perhaps over-indulgence of one's friends is a critical sin which can be forgiven more readily than many another.

Third, Conrad has certain critical "blind spots". For example, he is insensitive to verse. One gathers that he read poetry, both in the older and the modern forms, but he makes little mention of it and no serious attempt to analyze it. He also had little understanding of the literature of the stage, as is apparent from our inquiry in a foregoing section of the present study. In the case of poetry, it is probably the rigid demands of the form which repel him; in the case of the theater, he probably grew impatient at the limited facilities for telling a story which are offered by the stage--after working on broad canvasses in the novel he felt hampered by the necessity of compact narration on the stage.

He seems also to be blind to what is fanciful and poetically symbolic in literature. He felt, for example, that Maeterlinck's poetic dramas were wistful baby-talk hiding a poverty of ideas.<sup>1</sup> The eerie allegory of Les Aveugles, the graceful symbolism of L'Oiseau Bleu, and the gloomy innuendo of L'Intruse--all were too insubstantial for Conrad. Although he realized that there are macabre and fantastic aspects of reality, he had his feet too firmly on the ground

<sup>1</sup>cf. p. 130 of this study.





to get much pleasure from a form of literature which depends so much on the magical, the intangible, the other-worldly. He believed that what lies before our eyes is so marvelous that there is no need to invent a supernatural world.<sup>1</sup> One does not encounter in his essays any particular fondness for the Irish poets, for the gracefulness of a man like Barrie, or for anything of a dainty or fanciful nature.

Fourth, he is unnecessarily belligerent in spurning all authority and dogma, in statements such as the following:

To try voluntarily to discover the fettering dogmas of some romantic, realistic, or naturalistic creed in the free work of its own inspiration, is a trick worthy of human perverseness which, after inventing an absurdity, endeavors to find for it a pedigree of distinguished ancestors. It is a weakness of inferior minds when it is not the cunning device of those who, uncertain of their talent, would seek to add lustre to it by the authority of a school....For the truth is that more than one kind of intellectual cowardice hides behind the literary formulas.<sup>2</sup>

He does not remember that it is precisely those who are "uncertain of their talent" who do not dare to enroll themselves in any school or to accept the merit of any common theory. The inferior talent is often forced to call attention to itself by an advertisement of differences rather than similarities. The second-rate artist must make the most of whatever departures from the conventional he can invent. As Eliot says: "....only the man who has so much to give that he can forget himself in his work can afford to collaborate,

<sup>1</sup>cf. pp. 112-123 of this study.

<sup>2</sup>"Books", in Notes on Life and Letters, p. 8.





to exchange, to contribute."<sup>1</sup> Actually, of course, Conrad was not out of his time and place, and he did draw from his contemporaries. But his insistence on freedom of action, on absolute individuality, strikes some readers as over-emphasized.

Fifth, he believes that criticism should have an adventurous spirit, that it should not submit tamely to convention. He laments that the critics of his day exhibit all too little of this independence and verve:

....An ideal of reserved manner, perhaps, or caution, or simply from weariness, induces, I suspect, some writers of criticism to conceal the adventurous side of their calling, and then the criticism becomes a mere "notice", as it were, the relation of a journey where nothing but the distances and the geology of a new country should be set down; the glimpses of strange beasts, the dangers of flood and field, the hair's-breadth escapes, and the sufferings (oh, the sufferings too! I have no doubt of the sufferings) of the traveler being carefully kept out; no shady spot, no fruitful plant being ever mentioned either; so that the whole performance looks like a mere feat of agility on the part of a trained pen running in a desert. A cruel spectacle--a most deplorable adventure.<sup>2</sup>

Sixth, some of his criticism is lacking in both restraint and authority. It lacks in restraint because it is an elaboration of his own morals and individual philosophy. In a person of such a unique and powerful personality as Conrad, such individuality sometimes produces eccentricity. It is not restrained by any "institutional attachment". Conrad's criticism, to a certain degree, lacks authority because he is not always clear about the aim of art. We find him saying, for example:

<sup>1</sup>T. S. Eliot, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>2</sup>A Personal Record, p. 96.





....Art is long and life is short, and success is very far off. And thus, doubtful of strength to travel so far, we talk a little about the aim--the aim of art, which, like life itself, is inspiring, difficult--obscured by mists. It is not in the clear logic of a triumphant conclusion; it is not in the unveiling of one of those heartless secrets which are called the Laws of Nature. It is not less great, but only more difficult.<sup>1</sup>

To be sure, the genesis and nature of a work of art is a matter of great complexity, and it is to Conrad's credit that he does not over-simplify it. Yet it is a matter which can be constantly inspected and analyzed--and the courageous critic is not too depressed because it is "obscured by mists".

Seventh, Conrad constantly insists upon the quality of sincerity, both in criticism and in fiction. Sincerity in one's view of mankind, sincerity in reporting one's reactions to a work of art, sincerity in excluding all that is not demanded by the inspired vision of the artist--these are postulates of the romanticist, who rejects the "rules" in favor of "unconditional sincerity of expression".

....For if expression is to be perfectly sincere, it must derive its law solely from the particular emergency of each individual case, and not from some habit or inertia of tradition....For romantic criticism, in maintaining the rights of the inner life, is as apt to resent the imposition of technique by authority. Thus Manzoni, in the famous preface to Il Conte di Carmagnola, says: "Every composition offers in itself to him who would examine it, the elements required for the formation of a judgment." And he goes on to collect the whole business of literary criticism into three great questions: What did the author attempt? Was it a thing worthy of being attempted? Has his attempt succeeded?<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Nigger of the Narcissus, preface, pp. xv-xvi.

<sup>2</sup>Lascelles Abercrombie, Romanticism, pp. 182-183.





In the foregoing pages we have listed some of the distinguishing characteristics of Joseph Conrad as critic and as novelist. We have noted his empiricism, his impressionism, and his several deficiencies and excellences. We have left to the last his romanticism, because this is a general and overlying classification which includes some of the traits already mentioned. We place him among the romanticists with the reservation that it is not possible to tag an original artist like Conrad with a single simple label which will adequately identify him. As a younger contemporary of Conrad has said:

....romanticism and classicism are not matters with which creative writers can afford to bother very much, or with which they do as a rule in practice greatly concern themselves. It is true that from time to time writers have labelled themselves "romanticists" or "classicists", just as they have from time to time banded themselves together under other names. These names which groups of writers and artists give themselves are the delight of professors and historians of literature, but should not be taken very seriously; their chief value is temporary and political--that, simply, of helping the authors to become known to a contemporary public; and I doubt whether any poet has ever done himself anything but harm by attempting to write as a "romantic" or as a "classicist"....At the moment when one writes, one is what one is, and the damage of a lifetime, and of having been born into an unsettled society, cannot be repaired at the moment of composition....the differences represented by these two terms are not such as can be confined to a purely literary context. In using them, you are ultimately bringing in all human values, and according to your own scheme of valuation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>T. S. Eliot, After Strange Gods, pp. 25-26.





But in spite of his departures from a perfect and mythical norm, we can say that Conrad's criticism has many tendencies of a sort which we have come to call "romantic". He is romantic in his criticism as he is in his fiction, although here again we encounter those who object to classifying him as either romantic or realistic. P. A. Hutchinson says impatiently:

Conrad, then, is not a "romantic realist", or a "realistic romantic", for those terms are meaningless; they are also an insult to the memory of one whose vision of the truth--in life as in art--while embracing all formulas, looked through them all to the clear light which they obscured while revealing. Yet Conrad, in his art, combined both realism and romanticism. To romanticism he gave the solid foundation and the dignity of realism; his realism he shot through and irradiated with the color and the glow of romance....<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps one of the difficulties in classifying Conrad as a critic resides in the fact that it is difficult to distinguish dominant critical tendencies in the era in which he wrote. It was a period of eclecticism, in which various schools clashed and merged--the influence of Matthew Arnold and of Anatole France--classicist and romanticist--conservative and radical. And this eclecticism in criticism was only another expression of the general shifting of values which was going on in politics, science, and economics. As Orlo Williams says:

Human criticism, even the most inspired and the most judicious, is never out of space and time; every critic belongs to his generation, to his nation, to his family. He has had the education of his period: he

<sup>1</sup>Essays in Memory of Barrett Wendell, p. 299.





and his contemporaries have reacted to the same influences as they have breathed the same air.... The wise critic observing himself and his fellow-practitioners, will not presume that he or they can attain the undistorted view of eternity.... Though it may be rash to speak of the "spirit of an age", as seeming to impose a false unity on what must at any moment be a bewildering variety, yet the variety of one age, which criticism attempts to reduce to order, differs from the variety of another.<sup>1</sup>

"The prosperity of a jest lies in the ear of the hearer." And Shakespeare's little maxim can be extended to the field of literary criticism. The nature and the effect of a critical theory is conditioned by the times in which the critic lives, by the particular audience to whom he speaks. Since Conrad was a man of his time, he must be considered in reference to that time. It is our contention that among all the intellectual forces which played upon his critical sensitivities, that of romanticism was the most important. Joseph Wood Krutch says that criticism "rationalizes and gives temporary form to our experiences with literature just as literature rationalizes and gives temporary form to our experiences with Nature."<sup>2</sup> We can extend the statement and say that it was the force of romanticism which rationalized and gave temporary form to Conrad's critical theory.

To support our claim we must first define what we mean by romanticism, and then point out the many elements in Conrad's work which partake of the nature of romanticism.

<sup>1</sup>op. cit., pp. 24-25.

<sup>2</sup>Experience and Art, p. 165.





To say that a critic is a romanticist is admittedly a tentative designation until one defines as clearly as possible what the term means, both in criticism and in original creative work. We may begin by setting forth the "spirit of romanticism", a spirit which has been most eloquently described by George Santayana:

Suffice it that Romance is something very old, and supplies that large element which is neither classical nor Christian in medieval and modern feeling. It lies deeper, I think, in most of us than any conventional belief or allegiance. It involves a certain sense of homelessness in a chaotic world, and at the same time a sense of meaning and beauty there. To Romance we owe the spirit of adventure; the code of honour, both masculine and feminine; chivalry and heraldry; feudal loyalty; hereditary nobility; courtesy; politeness, and pity; the love of nature; rhyme and perhaps lyric melody; imaginative love and fidelity; sentimentality; humour. Romance was a great luminous mist blowing from the country into the ancient town; in the wide land of Romance everything was vaguely placed and man migratory; the knight, the troubador, or the palmer carried all his permanent possessions on his back, or in his bosom. So did the wandering student and the court fool. There was much play with the picturesque and the miraculous; perhaps the cockiness of changing fashions has the same source. Fancy has freer play when men are not deeply respectful to custom or reason, but feel the magic of strangeness and distance, and the profound absurdity of things. Even the intellect in the romantic world becomes subject to moods: attention was arrested at the subjective.<sup>1</sup>

Another description of the "spirit" of romanticism is furnished by Professor More when he says that romanticism

<sup>1</sup>The Genteel Tradition at Bay, p. 14.





means

....certain attributes of poetry [or art] of every age when it rises from the common level to climaxes of inspiration--the moments in it when we are thrilled by the indefinable spell of strangeness wedded to beauty, when we are startled by the unexpected vision of mystery beyond the circle of appearances that wrap us in the dull commonplace of daily usage, and suddenly "the immeasurable heavens break open to their highest."<sup>1</sup>

The two foregoing paragraphs refer to what might be called "absolute" romanticism, elements of which may be found in great artists throughout the history of art. In dealing with Conrad, however, one must consider not only the general spirit or attitude of romanticism, but also the particular manifestations of romanticism as they appear in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in England and elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

The modern romanticist is likely to emphasize that the true soul of literature, its chief function, is to serve as a medium of self-expression for the artist. It is his avenue of communication, his means of making vivid and intelligible his vision of reality. This "expression" may take various forms: Mme. de Staël's view that literature is an expression of society, Sainte-Beuve's theory that it is an expression of personality, or Taine's view that it is an expression of race, age, and environment.

<sup>1</sup>Paul Elmer More, The Drift of Romanticism, p. ix.

<sup>2</sup>We shall not attempt to "evaluate" this modern school, or to debate whether More is right when he calls it "the wonder and strangeness that go with the dissolving together of the human soul and nature, the vague revery that takes the place of insight, the pantheism that has forgotten the true surprise of the supernatural".





Another tenet of the romantic school is that truth is provisional and that mankind moves more or less uncertainly from one error to another. The truths of esthetics are particularly baffling and changeable, and it is useless in this field to search for stable criteria. The critic who believes that he has found "the truth" in esthetics is likely to suffer thenceforth from a messianic urge to force it upon his audience and to impose his rigorous definition upon all art.

As between the judicial and scientific criticism on the one hand and the impressionistic on the other, the romanticist is likely to choose the latter; that is, he argues that except in matters of fact, there is no appeal from individual taste and hence there is no permanent and universal standard of judgment. In this respect he places himself in a long and honorable line of critics: traces of this individuality are found not only in modern criticism but also in classical and renaissance times, in the 16th century Pietro Aretino, in the 17th century Chevalier de Maré and Saint-Evremond, and here and there in the 18th century precursors of romanticism in England. Ludwig Lewisohn has some interesting samplings of this point of view in his A Modern Book of Criticism.

As a corollary to the view that the artist should not be subjected to rules which are at best temporary and local, the romanticist argues that the writer should learn his craft from the practice of good poets and prose-writers, and from





his own estimate of the necessities of the particular creative endeavor, rather than from arbitrarily imposed literary doctrines.

The romanticist further contends that the primary object of literature is to delight rather than to inform or reform, that its soul is imagination, that its body is style.<sup>1</sup> In other words the artist need not hold to a conscious moral purpose, the world of his own special imagining has a validity of its own, and he must ever study the best manner of communicating his vision.

The term "romanticism" is a very capacious one, and lest we fall into the temptation to expand it so far that it will be of little real use in discussing Conrad, we must limit our definition to one more paragraph.

To conclude, then, we may say that the romanticist often concerns himself with nature, especially his own subjective view of nature. He is sympathetic with the "back to nature" instinct of civilized man. He is likely to withdraw "from outer experience in order to concentrate on inner experience".<sup>2</sup> (The romanticist, of course, has no monopoly of inner experience.) He can conceive of a reality beyond ordinary experience, and is attracted by the distant past, by lands beyond the horizon, by Utopias. He seeks, by his own genius, to make the multiplicity of the outer world intelligible by

<sup>1</sup>cf. George Saintsbury, A History of English Criticism, chapter on "Wordsworth and Coleridge".

<sup>2</sup>Lascelles Abercrombie, Romanticism, p. 51.





reducing it to a few central concepts--what Conrad calls " a few very simple ideas, chief of which is Solidarity". He is likely to put emphasis upon "enthusiasm", egoism, humanitarianism, and the ethics of Christianity, at least as far as they demand that man love his brother man.

It should be noted that an artist need not possess all of the foregoing characteristics in order to be called a romanticist, and that a classicist may reveal, at least in parts of his creation, some of these same characteristics. Although Conrad is prevailingly romantic in his conceptions, he shows little fondness for humanitarianism, ecstasy, or the conventional ethics of Christianity. In describing Conrad's critical position we hope to avoid the error of erecting a definition and then squeezing Conrad into a shape which will fit the definition.

Although our primary concern is with Conrad as a critic, it is necessary to point out the romantic elements in his original creative fiction. Any casual reader of his novels can testify that he appeals "to that part of our being which is not dependent on wisdom: to that in us which is a gift and not an acquisition....to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives". With the typical egoism of a romanticist, he tells his stories with the purpose of providing "an imaginative and exact rendering of authentic memories....and the emotions of the man reviewing his own experiences".





Emotion--action--temperament: these are the conditions which one meets in Conrad's characters. Most of them--Almayer, Stromberg, Nostromo, Whalley, and even Lord Jim--are characteristically unintellectual. Marlowe is an exception, but this restless and discursive seaman is merely Conrad's other self, rather than a real member of the *dramatis personae*. The other characters, even when their actions are prompted by rationality, are not made happy thereby. Their interests are best served by a healthy, simple, animal response to life. Their misfortunes seem to vindicate Conrad's contention that "thinking is the great enemy of perfection.... the habit of profound reflection.... is the most pernicious of all the habits formed by the civilized man".

The novels do not serve any particular morality; they were not written with any deliberate intention to persuade mankind to abandon the instinctive level and ascend to the level of rationality. The unhappiness of Lord Jim after his leap from the decks of the Patna was not meant as a warning against cowardice; Almayer's folly was not designed to show the bad effects of "going native"; Mr. Verloc's violent demise was not concocted by the author to deter anarchists. They are simple, romantic men whose virtues and blunderings are much of a piece with those of mankind anywhere.

Another romantic aspect of the novels is that many of the characters are on a quest. It is not that they are on the quest of a Grail--Conrad was not that much of a medievalist--





but their search is often for something just as difficult and illusory. One is trying to recover his soul, another tries to cross a shadow-line which marks the area between life and death for him and his crew, another searches for something worthwhile enough to make him put his trust in life, another fanatically works for the destruction of the human society in which he can find no place.

The settings of Conrad's novels are, of course, very romantic--the heart of Africa, the West Indies, the Malay Archipelago, the China coast, the Indian ocean. In this exotic setting his mariners, traders, smugglers, and native tribesmen wander far and wide with what Santayana, in his description of romanticism, calls "a certain sense of homelessness in a chaotic world". Yet there is meaning and beauty in this world of islands, odorous coast-towns, and treacherous seas. There is adventure and violent action. There are stories of men who, migratory and often defeated, yet hold to obscure codes of honor. In their struggles there is often something of the humorous and absurd. And over all is the enchantment of distance and strangeness.

We can thus summarize the romantic elements in the novels. There are other elements in them, too, but the general, prevailing spirit is that of romanticism.

An examination of Conrad's critical theory reveals that he had certain prepossessions, certain attitudes and emphases, which may be called "romantic"--if we are willing





to accept the rather broad and flexible definition of the term which has been suggested in foregoing pages. We place him among the romantic critics not because he himself would wish to be identified with this or any other special school but because even a rough classification helps us to discuss and evaluate a contemporary author. In certain respects, too, he does not sound like a romanticist at all; his remarks on the necessity of restraint and decorum, for instance, might well have come from Irving Babbitt, who has said many sharp things against romanticism. We do not mean to imply, either, that in all ways he followed his own theory when he came to the actual practice of writing novels. Sometimes it would seem that he set down critical maxims for himself after the event--after he had become aware of his own excesses or deficiencies. At times he even seems skeptical about the value of having a theory at all, feeling that a vigorous creative instinct, allied with sincerity and sensitivity, can accomplish its ends without the restraints of a critical system. Nevertheless, he has given us his theory in some detail, and it remains for us to point out the romantic elements in it. We shall do this by listing, without much comment, a series of critical propositions which Conrad makes.

1. The artist must begin by creating for himself a world in which he can honestly believe, and which he can describe





with sincerity. "This world cannot be made otherwise than in his own image; it is fated to remain individual and a little mysterious, and yet it must resemble something already familiar to the experience, the thoughts and the sensations of his readers."<sup>1</sup>

2. The quest for happiness "is the only theme that can be legitimately developed by the novelist who is the chronicler of the adventures of mankind amongst the dangers of the kingdom of the earth."<sup>2</sup>

3. A work of art must seek to find the single underlying truth of the manifold facts of experience, to find in its forms, colors, and shadows "their one illuminating and convincing quality--the very truth of their existence".

4. The artist appeals to that part of our being which is apart from intellect and wisdom, "to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain".

5. The artist recognizes "the latent feeling of fellowship" with all creation, the solidarity that brings together "the loneliness of innumerable hearts....in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear".<sup>2</sup>

6. The true artist bares his soul to his audience, but this revelation may end in a maudlin and contemptible excess unless

<sup>1</sup>The italics throughout this section are mine; they are intended to call attention to typically romantic concepts.

<sup>2</sup>Attention is drawn here to the characteristically wistful, nostalgic, and melancholy aspects of romanticism.





properly guided. But restraint should not be unduly praised, since it may be merely temperament or pride. Every novel is partly autobiography, "since the author can only express himself in his creation", but nothing can be more humiliating "than to see the shaft of one's emotion miss the mark of either laughter or tears". In a project which mostly consists in "laying one's soul more or less bare to the world," a regard for decency and dignity is necessary.

7. The aim of a historian of hearts "is to reach the very fount of laughter and tears. The sight of human affairs deserves admiration and pity."

8. "Only in men's imagination does every truth find an effective and undeniable existence. Imagination, not invention, is the supreme master of art as of life."

9. An important function of art is to relieve the individual of his boredom or sorrow, to transport him to a better and more interesting world. "....the demand of the individual to the artist is, in effect, the cry, 'Take me out of myself!'"

10. "The artist in his calling of interpreter creates.... because he must. He is so much of a voice that for him silence is like death."<sup>1</sup>

11. The artist must treat events only as evidences of human sensation, "as the outward sign of inward feelings,--of live feelings,--which alone are truly pathetic and interesting."

<sup>1</sup>Conrad sounds here like the modern romanticist who believes that all art is expression--although Conrad would certainly never claim that all expression is art.





In order to disclose human souls the artist must cultivate his poetic faculty. He must squeeze out of himself "every sensation, every thought, every image,--mercilessly, without reserve and without remorse."

12. "Thinking is the great enemy of perfection. The habit of profound reflection....is the most pernicious of all the habits formed by the civilized man."

13. In his dealings with mankind the artist should be capable of "giving a tender recognition to their obscure virtues", of looking with "a large forgiveness at men's ideas and prejudices".

14. "The ethical view of the universe involves us at last in so many cruel and absurd contradictions, that I have come to suspect that the aim of creation cannot be ethical at all. I would fondly believe that its object is purely spectacular."

15. "The temporal world rests on a very few simple ideas; so simple that they must be as old as the hills. It rests notably, among others, on the idea of Fidelity."

16. Fiction, if it is truly artistic, appeals to temperament. It must be, "like painting, like music, like all art, the appeal of one temperament to all the other innumerable temperaments...."

17. Art is "an imaginative effort finding its inspirations from the reality of forms and sensations".

18. "All my concern has been with the "ideal" value of things, events, and people. That and nothing else."





19. "All creative art is magic, is evocation of the unseen in forms persuasive, enlightening, familiar and surprising."

20. The artist does not need to look to the supernatural for his effects, because "the world of the living contains enough marvels and mysteries as it is....acting upon our emotions and intelligence in ways so inexplicable that it would almost justify the conception of life as an enchanted state."

21. The "romantic feeling of reality" should be disciplined by" a sense of personal responsibility and a recognition of the hard facts of life shared with the rest of mankind.... Such romanticism is not a sin. It is none the worse for the knowledge of truth. It only tries to make the best of it, hard as it may be; and in this hardness discovers a certain aspect of beauty."

22. "Even before the most seductive reveries I have remained mindful of that sobriety of interior life....in which alone the naked form of truth....can be rendered without shame."

23. Only by the most careful attention to "the shape and ring of sentences" can the writer achieve plasticity and color, in order that "the light of magic suggestiveness may be brought to play for an evanescent instant over the commonplace surface of words."

24. "....And in this matter of life and art it is not the Why that matters so much to our happiness as the How."





25. "The power of sound has always been greater than the power of sense. I don't say this by way of disparagement. It is better for mankind to be impressionable than reflective."
26. "Give me the right word and the right accent and I will move the world."

This series of quotations, drawn from various critical writings of Joseph Conrad and discussed at greater length in the body of this present study, furnish, we believe, a key to his critical attitude. They reveal him to us as essentially a romanticist, one of a group which, at the turn of the century, began to proclaim eloquently the freedom of criticism--freedom from what they called dogmatism, coldness, uninspired scholarship, dependence upon desiccated rules. Whatever their faults--untutored enthusiasm, lack of emotional stability, nebulous definitions, arrogance--they contributed a new vitality to criticism, a better hospitality for what was experimental and adventurous in literature. Conrad was one of the most attractive of them.





## Chapter XI

## CONCLUSION

Rich as it was, the British tradition of novel writing played little part in the development of Joseph Conrad's art. Although he read the older British novelists with the interest and delight of a sensitive, well educated foreigner, there is little evidence that he studied them as models or that he was attracted by their theory of craftsmanship. His indebtedness is more to French writers of fiction than to English. This does not mean, however, that he was not aware of literary currents in England, especially in the last two decades of the 19th century, when he made the transition from seaman to author. In those years he became an active member of the literary community in London, and was the close friend of many notable English writers. But he was influenced by his literary milieu only in that indirect way in which any intelligent mind is affected by the intellectual cross-currents of the day. The eclecticism, experimentation, search for new subject matters, and the absence of an authoritative literary dogma--all of these tendencies in fiction writing in the decades from 1894-1924--made it natural for an individualistic writer like Conrad to range widely in search for a technique suited to his own peculiar genius.





Conrad's preparation for his craft was unorthodox, and it is difficult to trace the formative intellectual influences which finally produced the critic and novelist. His Polish nationality, his experience in Russia, his helter-skelter Continental education, his life as a mariner, and his adoption of English nationality all worked in diverse ways upon his sensitive nature. As far as his growth as a critic is concerned, it is to be noted that he was removed at an early age from the strictly bookish society in which most professional critics are trained. He developed a wide, cosmopolitan acquaintance with literature, but had no formal schooling in aesthetics or literary criticism as such. He was able to discuss some of the problems of critical theory, but the most interesting part of Conrad's criticism, is that which deals with the immediate practical aspects of the mechanics of novel-writing.

He had certain critical prepossessions which, he admits, derived largely from the French romanticists. He was, however, unhampered by any well-defined critical dogma in the literary world and acknowledged no great indebtedness to any school of English criticism. He followed the magazine criticism of the day, but only with the curiosity which nearly all writers feel when their own work and that of their contemporaries is being analyzed. Certainly he never rushed to the defence of a particular school of criticism.





Like any thoughtful artist, Conrad speculated about the ends and purpose of his art, and felt the necessity for formulating some sort of theory to explain the novels which it was his main business to write. The theory which he arrived at was on the whole simply expressed and not at all esoteric, but for him it was a satisfactory touchstone. From his scattered critical writings we can only piece together for him his general theory of art, and then, in turn, deal more certainly with his practical precepts for the creation of fiction.

We can conveniently discuss his general theory by listing certain qualities which he insists shall appear in the work of a good artist. The first of these is Truth. All artists at times abandon the first purity of their conceptions, and through some intellectual or spiritual lapse are betrayed by insincerity, distortion, or excessive sentimentality. But the artist must begin "by creating for himself a world, great or little, in which he can honestly believe", and by rendering "the highest kind of justice to the visible Universe". He owes allegiance, Conrad says, to the truth about human souls.

Another necessary quality is Restraint. Conrad suspects that the artist who delights in depicting the extremities of emotion debases his subject. He admits that in order to achieve his effect the writer may be permitted to exceed the bounds of his normal reactions, but he has the responsibility of taking full advantage of emotional values without





descending into the merely spectacular and sentimental. Yet this emotional self-containment need not result in dryness or detachment. It is merely a technique, an artistic ambition, for achieving a deeper and more legitimate appeal in one's work. Conrad recoils from the eccentric and revolutionary in art--partly out of fear that his own ardent nature might suffer from lack of restraint.

Conrad tends to minimize the importance of intellect, rationality, and reflection in art, even though he insists upon restraint in method. He says that "thinking is the great enemy of perfection" and emphasizes the validity of the senses, the emotions, the temperament. The finest art is a result of great, spontaneous releases of creative ardor rather than mere knowledge, mere intellect, mere science. When translated into critical theory this antagonism to rationality and objectivity tends to produce impressionism and individualism.

Another faculty of highest importance in creative art is Imagination, which to Conrad is an agency which can evoke the dimly apprehended aspects of our lives as well as that which is familiar. The imaginative artist delves for the subtler meanings which lie below the surface; it is he who, in the most complex situations in which men find themselves, interprets, reassures, and inspires. "An imaginative and exact rendering of authentic memories" is the artist's task; he must have the power of drawing a picture of reality which is tangible and recognizable to the beholder.





Freedom from didacticism and special pleading is another necessity in good art. Conrad believes that the art which is merely documentation for the purpose of reforming society or pointing a moral is a lesser form of art. Although not concerned with a narrow, special morality, he is willing to say that an artist must make basic moral judgments. While insisting that art should not serve a particular dogma, he does not claim for the artist the dangerous license of moral Nihilism, and he warns of the arrogance of a declared pessimism. The artist must make many acts of faith. If he faithfully records his experiences and observations, if in his dealings with mankind he is capable of "giving a tender recognition to their obscure virtues", then he is moral in the highest sense.

Although he admits that the artist is moral when he uses his best faculties in a strenuous and sincere effort, Conrad is curiously reluctant to accept an ethical view of the Universe. He is tempted into the view that right and wrong are hopelessly involved, that ethical concepts are merely relative, and that man can best live in this world of shifting values by a stoical fortitude, by a refusal to despair. The aim of the artist is to remain true to the emotions aroused by the magnitude and wonder of the universe, a universe which has room for inspiration of every sort and for artists of every degree.





In addition to the foregoing general credo, Conrad has a particular set of assumptions relating to his own special province--the art of the novel. He arrived at these quite naturally by a wide if unsystematized reading in three languages, by endless re-writing and experimentation, and by long discussions with his literary friends in England. These assumptions may be stated briefly as follows:

First, all fiction, if it aspires to be art, appeals to temperament. Like all arts, it is the appeal of one temperament to innumerable others, and must be made through the medium of the senses. Here we have another expression of the idea that the senses and the emotions, rather than the intellect and the reason, are the avenues by which the creative artist reaches his audience. A simple projection of the idea is that there are no fixed criteria for judging literature and art, that most judgments are subjective, and that the personal equation produces all sorts of contradictions among critics.

Second, the novelist must be a critic who has a natural perceptiveness arising from the conviction that human life is immensely significant--the relation of man with his fellow man, the quality of his gods, his loyalties, and the passions and appetites which degrade or inspire him. He makes a new synthesis of the reality which lies before him,





imaginatively selecting and combining the elements, searching for the "ideal" value of men, events, and institutions.

Third, the gifted novelist interprets life for us, revealing aspects of our world which we had not previously suspected and preserving for us a new universe which surprises us and yet pleases us by its correspondence with our own experience. He is not only an interpreter but also a historian.

With these general ideals before him, Conrad proceeded to study various technical devices by which they could be achieved. This is what we have called his "practical" criticism. It arises largely out of his own painful experience with the difficult matters of style, invention, grouping, perspective, angle of narration, character study, and so on. The record which he has left of his own technical development is a fine handbook for those who would engage upon the enterprise of writing a novel.

Another aspect of Conrad's "practical" criticism, small in body but interesting in content, is the estimate he makes of other writers. This is often fragmentary and impulsive, but it shows something of the critical set of his mind. Most of it is devoted to men whom he admired heartily, and it is often marked by excessive generosity.

In Henry James he notes technical perfection and a highly civilized, cosmopolitan mind. In Turgenev he finds absolute sanity and deep sensibility, in Stephen Crane a





delicate impressionism, in Daudet clarity of vision and undeviating honesty. Maupassant is one of his particular heroes, and he praises the Frenchman for austerity, a perfect rendering of facts, and a fine literary conscience. He points out Anatole France's compassion, strong convictions, hatred of sentimentality, and critical temperament joined to creative power. He subscribes to Flaubert's principle of aloofness on the part of an author. He makes scattered comments on many other authors, ranging from Fenimore Cooper to Marcel Proust, from Samuel Johnson to d'Annunzio and Maeterlinck.

Finally we come to a discussion of the type of critic Conrad is. The first point to be noted is that he is an empiricist, by which we mean that he relies upon practical experience and observation rather than upon a consciously learned theory and science. He believes that criticism is a highly individual, personalized activity not at all dependent on "The Rules", that the formulas of art are "variable, unstable and untrustworthy". Although he finally arrived at a well-considered literary theory, he did so by experimentation rather than by the formal precepts of any school.

The next point is that Conrad is an impressionist in criticism; that is, he believes that the last court of appeal in judging a work of art is the impression which each reader gets from it, that judgments depend upon all sorts of variables. Impressions which spring from ignorance or a





hasty temper, however, do not make good criticism: the good critic must have artistic experience and knowledge, and must be free from insincerity and flippancy.

Conrad may also be described as a "self-conscious" critic, in that he constantly examines the technique and purpose of his own writing with the very practical intention of perfecting his gift for writing novels. (This self-analysis is in a very worthy tradition of English criticism.)

Among his faults as a critic are the following: he is often over-generous and prejudiced in his criticism of the writings of his friends, a failing which is more apparent in his letters than in his essays; he has certain "blind spots"--for instance, his insensitivity to verse, his lack of appreciation of the theater, and his impatience with what is fanciful and poetically symbolic in literature; he is unnecessarily belligerent in spurning authority and dogma in criticism; sometimes he shows a lack of restraint, partly because he has a unique and powerful personality and partly because he is unchecked by any "institutional attachment".

With the reservation that it is not possible to identify adequately an original artist like Conrad with a single simple label, we place him with the romanticists in criticism. In spite of his departures from a perfect and mythical norm, his criticism and creative fiction has many tendencies of a sort which we have come to call "romantic". It was the force of romanticism which rationalized and gave temporary form to Conrad's critical theory.





To call a critic "romantic" is admittedly a tentative tag until the term is defined. This we have attempted to do in the preceding chapter. Conrad would probably have objected to this or any other classification; indeed, sometimes he does not sound like a romanticist at all, and he does not always follow his own theory when he writes his novels. Nevertheless, he has given us his theory in some detail, and it is possible to point out many romantic elements in it.

But far more important than any prevailing critical tendency which we may ascribe to Conrad is the magnificent series of stories which he has spun for us. Whatever the planning that lies behind them, whatever the theory that motivates them, they remain a beautiful tribute "to the imperishable sea, to the ships that are no more, and to the simple men who have had their day".





## Chapter XII

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Joseph Conrad was not only a fascinating personality and a highly gifted novelist, but also a shrewd and discerning critic of his own and other men's works. It is the purpose of this study to abstract and arrange his critical theory in order to point out a generally unsuspected ability in Conrad, and to contribute to a better understanding of his novels.

Since nearly everything that an author writes is in a sense an index to the man himself, it was felt necessary, in reconstructing Conrad's critical theory, to read not only his essays and letters, but all of his fiction. It was found useful to read, also, everything of importance which has been written about him, in order to check and illuminate the present writer's own estimate. This study attempts to cull out all the literary theorizing from Conrad's writings and arrange them in a coherent fashion, to observe the fundamental principles underlying his criticism, to check his theory against his actual literary practice, to evaluate his critical ideas, and to place him among the critics of his generation.

The principal loci critici in Conrad are the prefaces to his novels, where he is frank, compact, and thoughtful; his letters, where he is informal and sometimes hasty; his autobiographical books, especially A Personal Record, Notes on Life





and Letters, and The Mirror of the Sea; his novels, where one can see something of his philosophical bent; and miscellaneous introductions to and appreciation of other men's books.

In order to furnish a background for Conrad the critic, this paper describes briefly the literary scene in England from 1894-1924, with special reference to the English novel and English criticism. As far as literary criticism is concerned, there is a curious lack of direction and purpose in this period, an eclectic character, a general British distrust of ideas regarding the arts, a dependence upon personal tastes rather than upon critical principles, and a certain measure of insularity.

Conrad's personal background is also discussed: his Polish nationality, his informal education, his life as a mariner, the transition from seaman to author, his naturalization as an Englishman, his English friends, his early literary tribulations. The effect of these forces on his character and general literary philosophy is treated briefly.

Very early in his writing career Conrad felt the necessity of erecting for himself a theory of art, and in the preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus is his first important manifesto. The theory which he finally evolved was not a particularly abstruse or esoteric one, but for him it satisfactorily bulwarked the judgments which he made in literary matters. That theory is gathered from all sources by the present writer, and the material is arranged under five heads:





Truth in Art, Restraint in Art, Imagination in Art, Reason and Reflection in Art, Morality and Special Purpose in Art.

Having outlined Conrad's general, comprehensive theories, the author then discusses Conrad's "practical" criticism. Most of this section is devoted to Conrad's theory of what makes a good novel, and there is considerable analysis of Conrad's own novels in order to determine the extent to which he followed his own theory. The main topics are: The General Aim of the Novelist, Theory of Plot Structure, Theory of Setting and Atmosphere, Theory of Character-Drawing, and Theory of Style. Brief mention is made of Conrad's theory of the drama. His literary enthusiasms and aversions are next described. These are not only examples of his criticism, but a record of the men who interested him as he formed his own technique. The list includes Henry James, Stephen Crane, Daudet, Maupassant, Anatole France, Turgenev, Dostoievsky, and various other writers from Chaucer to his own day.

The concluding pages are intended to show Conrad's prevailing critical attitudes and prepossessions, and to place him among the critics of the day. The author devotes some detail to Conrad's empiricism, his impressionism, and his romanticism. Romanticism is defined as carefully as possible, and then various romantic elements in Conrad's critical theory are pointed out, the writer's conclusion being that despite his scorn of particular schools and dogmas in criticism, Conrad's prevailing critical tendencies are those of the romantics.





## Chapter XIII

## CLASSIFIED BIBLIOGRAPHY

## A. Chronological Publication List of Conrad's Writings

CONRAD, JOSEPH. Almayer's Folly: A Story of an Eastern River

London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1895

An Outcast of the Islands

London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1896

The Children of the Sea: A Tale of the Forecastle

New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1897 (the first edition in England was published as The Nigger of the Narcissus by William Heinemann, London, 1898)

Tales of Unrest ("The Idiots", "Karain", "An Outpost of Progress", "The Return", "The Lagoon")

London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898

Lord Jim: A Tale

Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1900

The Inheritors: An Extravagant Story (written in collaboration with Ford Madox Hueffer)

New York: McClure, Phillips & Co., 1901

Youth: A Narrative, and Two Other Stories ("Heart of Darkness" and "The End of the Tether")

Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1902

Typhoon

New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1902. The first edition in England was published under the title of Typhoon, and Other Stories ("Amy Foster", "Tomorrow", "Falk") by William Heinemann, London, 1903.





CONRAD, JOSEPH. Romance: A Novel (written in collaboration with Ford Madox Hueffer)

London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1903  
New York: McClure, Phillips & Co., 1904

Nostromo: A Tale of the Seaboard

New York: Harper & Brothers, 1904

The Mirror of the Sea: Memories and Impressions

London: Methuen & Co., 1906  
New York: Harper & Brothers, 1906

The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale

London: Methuen & Co., 1907  
New York: Harper & Brothers, 1907

A Set of Six ("Gaspar Ruiz", "The Informer", "The Brute", "An Anarchist", "The Duel", "Il Conde")

London: Methuen & Co., 1908  
"An Anarchist" and "The Informer" were published earlier in Harper's Magazine, the first in August, 1906, the second in December, 1906. "The Duel" was published in Forum Magazine, July-October, 1908, as "The Point of Honor".

Under Western Eyes

London: Methuen & Co., 1911  
New York: Harper & Brothers, 1911

Some Reminiscences

London: Eveleigh Nash, 1912  
New York: Harper & Brothers, 1912 (under the title A Personal Record)

'Twixt Land and Sea: Tales ("A Smile of Fortune", "The Secret Sharer", "Freya of the Seven Islands")

London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1912  
New York: Geo. H. Doran & Co., 1912





CONRAD, JOSEPH. Chance: A Tale in Two Parts

London: Methuen & Co., 1913

New York: Doubleday-Page & Co., 1914

Within the Tides: Tales ("The Planter of Malata", "The Partner", "The Inn of the Two Witches", "Because of the Dollars")

London and Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1915

"The Partner" was published earlier in Harper's Magazine, November, 1911

Victory: An Island Tale

London: Methuen & Co., 1915

New York: Doubleday-Page & Co., 1915

One Day More: A Play in One Act

London: privately printed by Clement Shorter, 1917. An edition was issued by the Beaumont Press in 1919 and by John Castle, London, 1924.

The Shadow-Line: A Confession

London and Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1917

New York: Doubleday-Page & Co., 1917

The Tale

London: privately printed by Clement Shorter, 1919, and later in Golden Book Magazine, January, 1927.

London's River

London: privately printed by Clement Shorter, 1919

The Polish Question: A Note on the Joint Protectorate of the Western Powers and Russia

London: privately printed by Clement Shorter, 1919

The Arrow of Gold: A Story Between Two Notes

New York: Doubleday-Page & Co., 1919





CONRAD, JOSEPH. Autocracy and War

London: printed for private circulation, 1919

Prince Roman

London: printed for the author by Richard Clay & Sons, 1920

The Warrior's Soul

London: printed for the author for private circulation by Richard Clay & Sons, London 1920. Later published in Golden Book Magazine, December, 1933.

The Rescue: A Romance of the Shallows

London and Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1920  
New York: Doubleday-Page & Co., 1920

Notes on Life and Letters

London and Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1921

Notes on My Books

London: William Heinemann, 1921  
New York: Doubleday-Page & Co., 1921

The Secret Agent: A Drama in Four Acts

Canterbury: H. J. Goulden, Ltd., 1921  
London: T. Werner Laurie, 1923

The Black Mate: A Story

Printed for the author for private distribution, 1922

John Galsworthy: An Appreciation

Canterbury: printed for private circulation by H. J. Goulden, Ltd., 1922

The Dover Patrol: A Tribute

Canterbury: printed for private circulation by H. J. Goulden, Ltd., 1922





CONRAD, JOSEPH. The Rover

London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1923

New York: Doubleday-Page & Co., 1923

The Torrens: A Personal Tribute

Privately printed by F. A. Hook, 1923

Introduction to Stephen Crane, by Thos. Beer

New York: Alfred Knopf, 1923

Marcel Proust: An English Tribute (collection of essays by Joseph Conrad and Others, collected by C. K. Scott-Monterieff)

New York: Thos. Seltzer, 1923

Hugh Walpole: Appreciations by Joseph Conrad, Arnold Bennett, and Joseph Hergesheimer

New York: Geo. Doran Co., N. D.

Laughing Ann: A Play

London: John Castle, 1924

The Nature of a Crime (written in collaboration with Ford Madox Hueffer)

London: Duckworth & Co., 1924

Geography and Some Explorers

London: privately printed by Strangeways & Son; also in National Geographic Magazine, March, 1924

Five Letters (written to Edward Noble)  
Posthumous

London: privately printed, 1925

Admiralty Paper

Privately printed for Jerome Kern, 1925





CONRAD, JOSEPH. Suspense: A Napoleonic Novel

London and Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1925  
New York: Doubleday-Page & Co., 1925

Tales of Hearsay

London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1925

Preface to Stephen Crane's Red Badge of Courage

London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1925

Last Essays

London and Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1926  
New York: Doubleday-Page & Co., 1926

Joseph Conrad's Diary of His Journey up the Valley of the Congo in 1890

London: Privately printed, with introduction and notes by Richard Curle, 1926

Joseph Conrad's Letters to His Wife

Edinburgh: privately printed by Neill & Co., Ltd., 1927

Letters (about 600 in number published in Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters by Geo. Jean-Aubry

London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1927  
New York: Doubleday-Page & Co., 1927

Letters From Conrad, 1896-1924 (edited with introduction and notes by Edward Garnett)

London: The Nonesuch Press, 1928  
Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1928

Letters From Joseph Conrad to Richard Curle

(edited with introduction and notes by R. C. Curle

London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1928  
New York: Doubleday-Doran, 1928, Crosby Gaige, 1928

The Sisters

New York: Crosby Gaige, 1928





CONRAD, JOSEPH. A Conrad Library: A Catalogue of Printed Books, Manuscripts, and Autograph Letters by Joseph Conrad, Collected by Thomas James Wise

London: privately printed, 1928

Works (Canterbury Edition)

New York: Doubleday-Doran, 1928

A Conrad Memorial Library (the collection of Geo. T. Keating, containing fragment of an unpublished manuscript by Conrad entitled "Marriage")

New York: Doubleday-Doran & Co., 1929

Letters to Stephen and Cora Crane (edited by C. Bohenberger and N. M. Hill)

Bookman Magazine 69: 225-35, May-June, 1929

Lettres Francaises (avec une introduction et des notes de G. Jean-Aubry)

Librairie Gallimard, 1929

Sketch of Joseph Conrad's Life (written by himself in 1900, privately printed for the friends of Marguerite and Howard Eric)

Portland, Maine: Southworth-Anthoensen Press, 1939

Letters of Joseph Conrad to Marguerite Poradowska, 1890-1920 (translated by John A. Gee and Paul J. Sturm)

New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1940





B. Bibliography of works concerning Joseph Conrad

- ADAMS, ELBRIDGE L. Joseph Conrad, The Man  
New York: W. E. Rudge, 1925
- AUBRY, GEORGE JEAN. Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters  
New York: Doubleday-Page, 1927. 2 vols.  
Joseph Conrad in the Congo  
London: Bookman's Journal, 1926
- BANCROFT, W. W. Joseph Conrad, His Philosophy of Life  
Boston: Stratford Co., 1933
- BENDZ, ERNEST. Joseph Conrad: An Appreciation  
Gothenberg: N. J. Gumpert, 1923
- BENNIWITZ, HILDEGARD. Die Charaktere in den Romanen Joseph Conrads  
Greifswald: H. Dallmeyer, 1933
- BRAYBROOKE, PATRICK. "Joseph Conrad". Some Victorian and Georgian Catholics  
London: Burns, Oates, and Washburn, Ltd., 1934
- BURKHARDT, JOHANNA. Das Erlebnis der Wirklichkeit unde Seine Kunstlerische Gestaltung in Joseph Conrads Werk  
Marburg: H. Bauer, 1935
- CONRAD, JESSIE (Mrs.) Did Joseph Conrad Return As a Spirit?  
Missouri: Webster Groves (Int'l Mark Twain Society) 1932  
Joseph Conrad and His Circle  
London: Jarrolds, Ltd., 1935  
Joseph Conrad As I Knew Him  
New York: Doubleday & Co., 1926





- CONRAD, JESSIE (Mrs.) Personal Recollections of Joseph Conrad  
London: privately printed, 1924
- CRANKSHAW, EDWARD. Joseph Conrad: Some Aspects of the Art of the Novel  
London: John Lane, 1936
- CROSS, W. L. "Joseph Conrad". Four Contemporary Novelists  
New York: Macmillan, 1930
- CURLE, RICHARD. Joseph Conrad: A Study  
New York: Doubleday-Page, 1914  
The Last Twelve Years of Joseph Conrad  
New York: Doubleday-Doran, 1928
- CUSHWA, FRANK W. An Introduction to Conrad  
New York: Doubleday-Doran, 1933
- DAVID, MAURICE. Joseph Conrad: l'homme et l'oeuvre  
Paris: La Nouvelle Revue Critique, 1929
- FOLLETT, WILSON. Joseph Conrad  
Privately printed. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1915
- FORD, F. M. Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance  
Boston: Little Brown, 1924
- GALSWORTHY, JOHN. Two Essays on Conrad  
Cincinnati: privately printed by Ebert Richardson Co., 1930
- GARNETT, EDWARD. Letters From Joseph Conrad, introduction to  
New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1928
- GORDAN, J. D. Joseph Conrad: The Making of a Novelist  
Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1940





- GRAHAM, R. B. CUNNINGHAME. Inveni Portam, Joseph Conrad  
Cleveland: The Rowfant Club, 1924
- HUTCHINSON, P. A. "Joseph Conrad--Alchemist of the Sea".  
Essays in Memory of Barrett Wendell  
by His Associates  
Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ.  
Press, 1926
- La Nouvelle Revue Francaise. Hommage a Joseph Conrad  
Paris, 1924
- MANDL, E. V. Die Frau bei Joseph Conrad  
Budapest: Druckerei der Pester  
Llyod-Gesellschaft, 1934
- MEGROZ, R. L. Joseph Conrad's Mind and Method  
London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1931
- \_\_\_\_\_ A Talk With Joseph Conrad  
London: E. Mathews, 1926
- MENCKEN, R. L. "Joseph Conrad". A Book of Prefaces  
New York: Alfred Knopf, 1917
- MORF, GUSTAV. The Polish Heritage of Joseph  
Conrad  
London: Sampson, Low & Marston, 1930
- O'FLAHERTY, LIAM. Joseph Conrad: An Appreciation  
London: E. Lahr, 1930
- STAUFFER, RUTH M. Joseph Conrad: His Romantic-Realism  
Boston: Four Seas Co., 1922
- STAWELL, F. M. "Conrad". Essays and Studies by  
Members of the English Association  
Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920.  
Vol. VI





SYMONS, ARTHUR.

Notes on Joseph Conrad

London: Myers & Co., 1925

SUTHERLAND, JOHN G.

At Sea With Joseph Conrad

Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1922

Twenty Letters to Joseph Conrad

(written by Rudyard Kipling,  
G. Jean-Aubry, Stephen Crane,  
John Galsworthy, George  
Gissing, Arnold Bennett,  
Constance Garnett, James  
Gibbons Huneker, Edward Garnett,  
H. G. Wells, E. V. Lucas,  
Henry James)

London: Curwen Press, 1926

WALPOLE, HUGH.

Joseph Conrad

London: Nisbet & Co., 1916

ZELIE, J. S.

Burial in Kent (written with E. L.  
Adams)

New York: W. E. Rudge, 1925





# C. Periodical Material Concerning Joseph Conrad

(Arranged according to the Method of the  
Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature)

July, 1937--June, 1939

Conrad by chance. B. Brown. Lit. Digest 125: 15 F5 '38

Read this one first. M. L. Becker, Scholastic 31: 22 -9 '37

July, 1932--June, 1937

Ideal wife of a genius. W. McFee. Am. Mercury 37: 116-19 Ja '37

Conrad and the sea. F. M. Ford. Am. Mercury 35: 167-76 Je '35

July, 1932--June, 1935

Conrad and Stevenson. C. Morley. Cath. World 135: 472-3 J1 '32

Conrad at thirty-one. Liv. Age. 343: 82-3 S '32

Conrad's revision of six of his short stories. G. W. Whiting.  
PMLA 48: 552-557 Je '33

Folder. C. Morley. Sat. R. Lit. 10: 55 Ag 19 '33

Joseph Conrad: ten years after. R. Curle. Fortn. 142: 189-99  
Ag '34

Jan., 1929--June, 1932

Conrad after five years. G. Hicks. New Repub. 61: 192-4 Ja 8 '30

Conrad and cowardice. G. Morf. Liv. Age. 340: 571-6 Ag '31

Conrad and the younger generation. R. Curle. 19th Cent. 107:  
103-12 Ja '30

Drunk on Conrad. E. Palffy. Fortn. 132: 534-8 O '29

Freudian autopsy upon a genius. H. F. Mencken. Am. Mercury.  
23: 251-3 Je '31

Genius at the turn of the century. W. Rothenstein. Atlan.  
149: 251-3 Je '31

Granules from an hour glass. C. Morley. Sat. R. Lit. 5: 997  
My 11 '29





- Illusions of Joseph Conrad. I. Anthony. Bookm. 74: 648-53  
 Mr. '32
- Joseph Conrad. C. F. Lloyd. Canad. Bookm. 13: 29-32 F '31
- Lord Jim; do you remember it? G. Overton. Mentor. 22: 34-5  
 O '30
- Polonisms in the English of Conrad's Chance. A. P. Coleman  
 PMLA XLVI, 463-468
- Ports of the Conrad country. R. Shaw. Golden Bk. 10: 124  
 O '29
- Three Americans and a Pole. F. M. Ford. Scrib. 90: 379-86  
 O '31
- Two enthusiasms. C. Morley. Atlan. 149: 403-6 Ap '32
- Working with Conrad. F. M. Ford. Yale R. 18: 699-715 Je '29  
 Jan., 1925--Dec., 1928
- Epitaph for Joseph Conrad. C. P. Cullen. Harper 150: 342 F '25
- How Conrad came to write. R. H. Platt. Mentor. 13: 20-3 Mr. '25
- Illusions of Joseph Conrad. W. Cross. Yale R. 17: 464-82 Ap '28
- Joseph Conrad. S. Zeromski. 19th Cent. 101: 406-16 Mr '27
- Joseph Conrad and the ironic attitude. H. P. Austin. Fortn.  
 130: 376-88 S '28
- Joseph Conrad, 1907--. W. Follett. Bookm. 67: 640-7 Ag '28
- Life and Work of Joseph Conrad. T. Moulton. Yale R. 14: 295-308  
 Ja '25
- Reminiscences of Conrad. J. Galsworthy. Scrib. 77: 3-10 Ja '25  
 Jan., 1922--Dec., 1924
- Blessing in disguise. Mrs. Jos. Conrad. Bookm. 59: 533-4  
 Jl '24
- Why lie? Bookm. 60: 179-80 O '24
- Conrad and Hardy. R. Aldington. Lit. R. 5: 8 S 6 '24





- Conrad in the east. R. Curle. Yale R. 12: 497-508 Ap '23
- Earlier and later days. Mrs. J. Conrad. Sat. Eve. Post  
197: 12-13 S 13 '24
- In the kingdom of Conrad. G. Overton. Bookm. 57: 275-86  
My '23
- Interview with Joseph Conrad. E. Rhys. Bookm. 56: 402-8  
D '22
- Joseph Conrad and Latin America. G. Jean-Aubry. Liv. Age  
317: 350-5 My 12 '23
- Joseph Conrad's heroic pessimism. Cur. Opin. 77: 630-1 N '24  
Jan., 1919--Dec., 1921
- Conrad compared with Dostoevsky and other masters. Cur. Opin.  
67: 320-1 D '19
- Conrad reveals his literary loves and antipathies. Cur. Opin.  
70: 819-21 Je '21
- Short stories of Joseph Conrad. J. J. Reilly. Cath. World  
109: 163-75 My '19  
Jan., 1915--Dec., 1918
- Advance of the English novel. W. L. Phelps. Bookm. 43: 297-304  
My '16
- Conrad. A. Symons. Forum. 53: 579-92 My '15
- Conrad's implacable comprehension interpreted by A. Symons.  
Cur. Opin. 64: 53 Ja '18
- Contemporary novelists: Joseph Conrad. H. T. Follett and  
W. Follett. Atlan. 119: 233-43 F '17
- Joseph Conrad: a contribution toward a bibliography. S. W. Eno.  
Bulletin of Bibliog. 9: 137-8 Ap '17  
Jan., 1910--Dec., 1914
- Conrad coming into his own. Bookm. 37: 594-5 Ag '13
- Master of literary color. E. Bjorkman. R. of Rs. 45: 557-60  
My '12
- Joseph Conrad's women. Grace Colbron. Bookm. 38 Ja '14





Jan., 1905--Dec., 1909

Disquisition on Conrad. J. Galsworthy. Fortn. 89: 627-33 Ap '08

Writings of Joseph Conrad. J. A. Macy. Atlan. 98: 697-702 N '06

Jan., 1900--Dec., 1904

Art of Joseph Conrad. H. Clifford. Liv. Age 236: 120-3 Ja 10 '03

Genius of Joseph Conrad. H. Clifford. No. Am. 178: 842-52 Je '04

Work of Joseph Conrad. Bookm. 20: 217-8 N '04

New York: Alfred Knopf, 1907

CROSS, WILSON L.

The Development of the English Novel

New York: Macmillan, 1935

QUILLIPS, J. W.

English Literature During the Last Half Century

ELIOT, T. S.

After Strange Gods

London: Faber & Faber, Ltd., 1934

Selected Essays

New York: Harcourt-Brace, 1932

BRUCE, WILLIAM.

Seven Types of Ambiguity

New York: Harcourt-Brace, 1931

ARTHUR, JOE. WOOD.

Experiences and Art

New York: Smith and Bask, 1932

LEWIS, E., and CAZAMIAN E.

A History of English Literature

London: J. M. Dent, 1933.  
revised ed.

LEWIS, E. M., and BROWN, H. S. The History of the Novel in England

Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1930

LEWIS, PERCY.

The Craft of Fiction

London: Jonathan Cape, 1931





## D. Bibliography of General References

- ABERCROMBIE, LASCELLES. Romanticism  
London: Martin Secker, Ltd., 1926
- BENNETT, ARNOLD. The Journals of Arnold Bennett  
London: Cassell & Co., 1932. 3 vols
- Cambridge History of English Literature
- CHEVALLEY, ABEL. The Modern English Novel  
New York: Alfred Knopf, 1927
- CROSS, WILBUR L. The Development of the English Novel  
New York: Macmillan, 1935
- CUNLIFFE, J. W. English Literature During the Last Half Century
- ELIOT, T. S. After Strange Gods  
London: Faber & Faber, Ltd., 1934
- \_\_\_\_\_. Selected Essays  
New York: Harcourt-Brace, 1932
- EMPSON, WILLIAM. Seven Types of Ambiguity  
New York: Harcourt-Brace, 1931
- KRUTCH, JOS. WOOD. Experience and Art  
New York: Smith and Haas, 1932
- LEGOUIS, E., and CAZAMIAN L. A History of English Literature  
London: J. M. Dent, 1933.  
revised ed.
- LOVETT, R. M., and HUGHES, H. S. The History of the Novel in England  
Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1932
- LUBBOCK, PERCY. The Craft of Fiction  
London: Jonathan Cape, 1921





MILLETT, F. B., MANLY, JOHN, and RICKERT, EDITH.

Contemporary British Literature

New York: Harcourt-Brace Co., 1935

Modern Book of Criticism, A. ed. by Ludwig Lewisohn

New York: Boni & Liveright, 1919

MORE, P. E.

The Drift of Romanticism

New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1913

MUIR, EDWIN.

The Present Age (From 1914)

London: The Cresset Press, 1939

RICHARDS, I. A.

Principles of Literary Criticism

New York: Harcourt-Brace, 1934

SAINTSBURY, GEORGE.

A History of English Criticism

New York: Dodd-Mead Co., 1911

SANTAYANA, GEORGE.

The Genteel Tradition at Bay

New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1931

SOMERVELL, D. C.

English Thought in the Nineteenth Century

New York: Longmans, Green Co., 1938

VERSCHOYLE, DEREK.

The English Novelists: A Survey of the Novel by Twenty Contemporary Novelists

New York: Harcourt-Brace, 1936

WALKER, HUGH.

The Literature of the Victorian Era

WARD, A. C.

Twentieth Century Literature

London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1936

WILLIAMS, HAROLD.

Modern English Writers (1890-1914)

London: Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd., 1918

WILLIAMS, ORLO.

Contemporary Criticism of Literature

London: Leonard Parsons, 1924





## APPENDIX

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

In setting forth the events and influences which went toward the making of Conrad as a critic and man of literature, one should emphasize the more obscure spiritual and intellectual forces rather than the outward physical side. Nevertheless, it is useful to present those outward events as a ready frame of reference.

Conrad was born December 3, 1857, a descendant of an honorable Polish family. His father, Apollo Nalecz Korzeniowski, married Evelina Bobrowska at Oratow, in Podopia, one of the southern provinces of Poland under Russian rule. In 1862 the parents moved to Warsaw, where the father engaged in rebellious activities against the Russia government, helping to organize the Polish National Committee. Relatives on both sides of the family were ardent fighters in the cause of Polish independence. One uncle, who was in the Provisional Polish Government, was killed in a duel with a political enemy in 1862; another was killed in the Polish revolt of 1863; another died in exile in Siberia in 1873. In 1862 Conrad's father was also sent to Russia in exile. The mother, who, at her own request had been allowed to accompany him, died in 1865.





Father and son were forced to accept help from her brother, Thaddeus Bowbrowski, and the next year the boy was sent to this uncle in the Polish Ukraine. In 1868 Apollo Korzeniowski was allowed to live in Lemberg, Galicia, and Conrad was sent to a Polish high school. In February, 1869, father and son went to live in Cracow, where the boy was sent to a preparatory school. Of this solemn, resigned period of his life Conrad writes:

I don't know what would have become of me if I had not been a reading boy. My prep finished I would have nothing to do but sit and watch the awful stillness of the sick room flow out through the closed door and coldly enfold my scared heart. I suppose that in a futile, childish way I would have gone crazy. But I was a reading boy. There were many books about, lying on consoles, on tables, and even on the floor, for we had not time to settle down. I read! What I did not read!<sup>1</sup>

In some ways the somberness of his boyhood, when he was deprived of his mother and left to the care of a disappointed and pain-wracked father, brought Conrad to an early maturity. As Jean-Aubry says, he was unconsciously trained in a fierce love of liberty and a hatred of a cramped life where it was impossible to breathe and act freely, to fight openly, and to speak thoughts above a whisper.<sup>2</sup>

After his father's death in May, 1869, when Conrad was eleven years old, his education was supervised by a tutor from the University of Cracow. By October of 1874 the formal

<sup>1</sup>"Poland Revisited", in Notes on Life and Letters, pp. 167-8.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Conrad, Life and Letters, I, 13-14 (hereafter cited as Joseph Conrad)





part of his education was over, and he left Cracow for Marseilles with the intention of going to sea. He was assisted, rather unwillingly, by Polish friends of the family in France who could not understand the impulses--not clear to Conrad himself--which turned him toward the mariner's life.

After three years of adventure, the details of which may be found in his own autobiographical writings, Conrad shipped aboard an English steamer bound for Constantinople with a cargo of coal. On the return she took on linseed for Lowestoft, where she arrived June 18, 1878--and Conrad, in his twenty-first year and knowing hardly a word of the language, first stepped on English soil.

He made rapid progress in mastering the English language and in winning promotion in the merchant marine. In June, 1880, he passed the examination for his third mate's ticket, and in August signed on the Loch Etive for a trip to Sidney. By 1881 he was second mate of the Palestine (a ship described in Youth) and tried to read Shakespeare while this uncertain and crotchety ship went through various repairs. After a trip which finally brought him as far as Singapore, he returned to London. He got his mate's license in July, 1883.

He became an English citizen in August, 1889, and in November of that year got his Master's certificate. In that year, too, he wrote his first story. This was a fairly readable yarn entitled "The Black Mate"--an unsuccessful entry for a prize offered by Tid-Bits.





Then came the Singapore and Borneo voyages where he met Almayer, Willems, and Tom Lingard. These characters afterwards found their way into some of his most interesting novels, and were important because, as Conrad said, it is certain there would never have been a line of his in print if he had not met Almayer.

He got his first command in a ship called the Otago, which is described in The Shadow Line and in Falk. After returning to London he began, in September, 1889, to write Almayer's Folly, a task which took five years to complete.

In the meantime, early in 1890, he visited his uncle in Poland; it was the first time he had seen that irascible but kind-hearted gentleman since 1874. Later in 1890 came his job in the Congo region, out of which he was to spin the material for Heart of Darkness, An Outpost of Progress, and the Congo Diary.

After this expedition his sea life was virtually over. After a year of enforced leisure he signed on the Torrens as first mate in November, 1891. He continued his work on Almayer's Folly. In March, 1893, he met John Galsworthy in Adelaide harbor, and here was the beginning of a friendship which was to prove of inestimable value after Conrad decided to embark on a writing career. He signed off the Torrens in October, 1893, and took a short voyage to Rouen as mate of the Adowa. On his return to London in





January, 1894, Conrad left the merchant service forever. In that same year his uncle, Thaddeus Bobrowski, died, leaving Conrad a small legacy. In 1895 he finished An Outcast of the Islands.

In the following year he married Miss Jessie George, and settled down to the new way of life which he had chosen. By 1897, with the completion of The Nigger of the Narcissus, he had determined irrevocably upon a literary career. In 1899 he won one-third of the Academy 150-guinea prize with his Tales of Unrest. The next year he finished Lord Jim, and in 1901 began his collaboration with Ford Madox Hueffer.<sup>1</sup> He was now in the full tide of his literary career. In 1905 he was granted a Civil List pension through the efforts of Edmund Gosse and William Rothenstein.

In the next half-dozen years an important series of works came from his pen. When the European War broke out he was in Cracow but managed to make his way back to England. After the war came a series of prefaces, the completion of The Rescue (twenty-three years after he had started it) the dramatization of The Secret Agent, a trip to Corsica in preparation for the Napoleonic story Suspense, and the completion of The Rover.

<sup>1</sup>The prefaces and appendix of The Nature of A Crime, published in New York by Doubleday-Page in 1924, give an interesting account of the method of collaboration of the two men.





In 1923 he visited New Haven and Boston. In 1924 he was offered a knighthood, which he declined. He tried to finish Suspense despite ill health, but succumbed to a heart attack on August 3, 1924. He was buried in Canterbury Cemetery.<sup>1</sup>

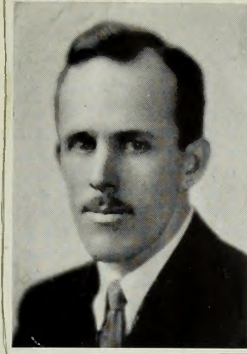
<sup>1</sup>This bare summary, with dates taken mostly from Morf and Jean-Aubry, is intended as a convenient reference for the reader, and as an indication of the intense activity of Conrad's life, the unusual compounding of physical and intellectual effort which carried him to far places, made him acquainted with all sorts of men and books, and preserved him from an insularity which might have lessened the value of his writings.





## Chapter XIV

## AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR



Born: April 14, 1904, in Norwood, Massachusetts, eldest son of Norris and Mena Potter.

Education: Grammar and high school in Norwood, graduated 1922. After two years' experience in brokerage office and paper mill, entered Colby College in 1924. Left college during 1928 for year's experience with automobile factory and traveling theatrical group.

Returned to Colby, graduated with Class of 1929.

Major interests were English literature and history.

Professional experience: Head of English Department and coach of track at Bridgton Academy, Maine, January-June, 1930. Appointed Instructor of English, Northeastern University, beginning September, 1930; Assistant Professor of English, 1933. Changed field to history in 1935. Appointed Assistant Professor of History and Government in 1936, Associate Professor and acting head of Department of History and Government in 1939.





Graduate study: Boston University Graduate School, 1930-33, majoring in English, given A. M. in 1933. Further graduate study in history and English at Harvard University, the University of Michigan, and Boston University, 1935-41. Candidate for Ph.D. at Boston University.

Societies: Phi Beta Kappa, American Historical Assoc., Foreign Policy Association, Latin-American Economic Institute, East Asiatic Society, Alpha Tau Omega Fraternity, U. S. Naval Reserve Officers' Association.

Family: Married Nettie Dorothy Pritchard (Abbott Academy, Nasson College, Boston University) in 1930. One daughter, Alan Ruth Potter, born 1933.



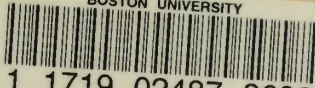








BOSTON UNIVERSITY



1 1719 02487 8698



